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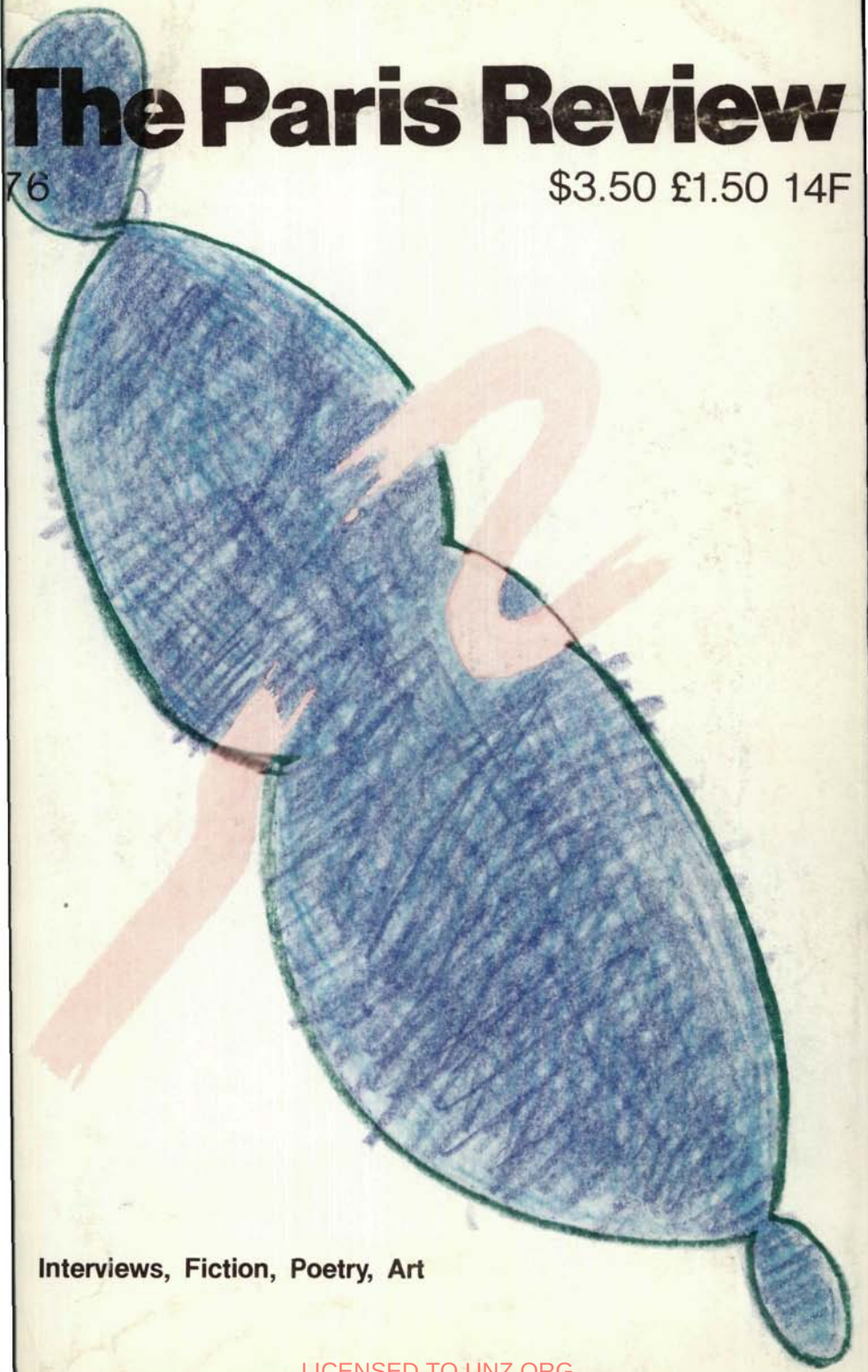

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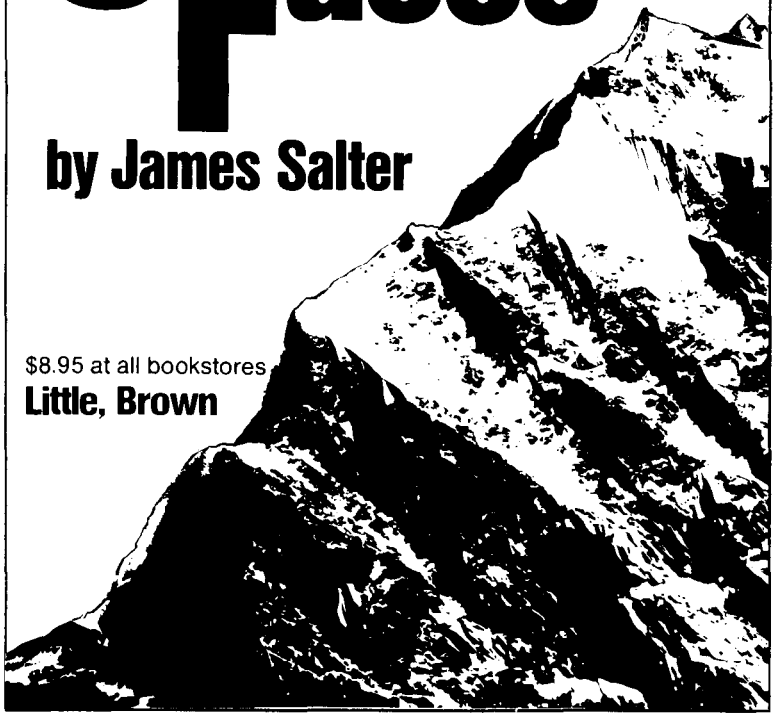

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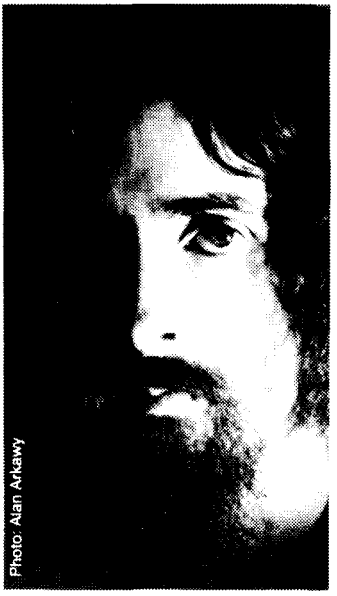

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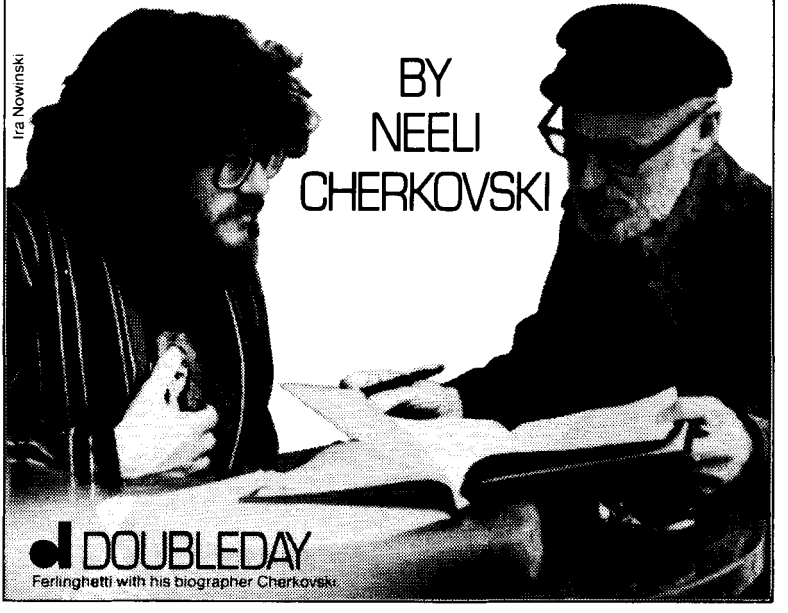

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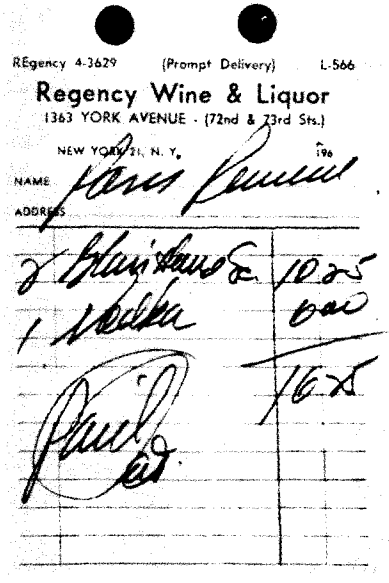

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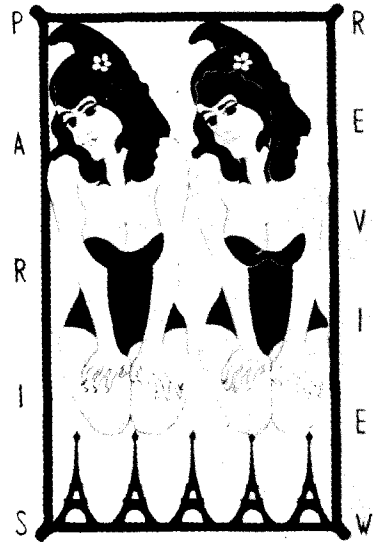

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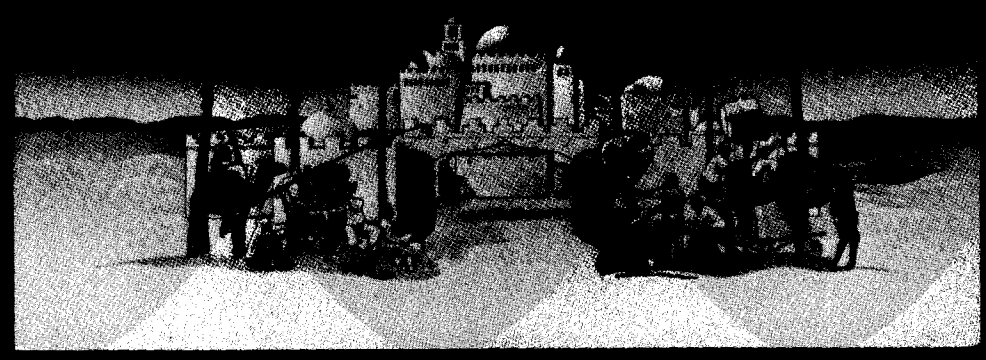

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The Paris Review is published quarterly by The Paris Review, Inc. Vol. 21, No. 76, Fall 1979. Office: 45-39 171 Place, Flushing, New York 11358. Paris Office: Jenny Childs, 14 rue Charlot, Paris 75003 France. London Office: Ann Winchester, 18 Clarendon Gardens, London W9 1AZ. Distributors in the USA: Eastern News Company. Printed in USA by Capital City Press. Typeset by Wizard Graphics.

Price per copy in USA: $3.25; in France: 14F; in the UK: £1.50. Post-paid subscription for four issues $11, for eight issues $20, for life $100. Postal surcharge of $4.00 per four issues outside USA (excluding life subscriptions). Subscription card is bound within magazine. Please give six weeks notice of change of address using subscription card.

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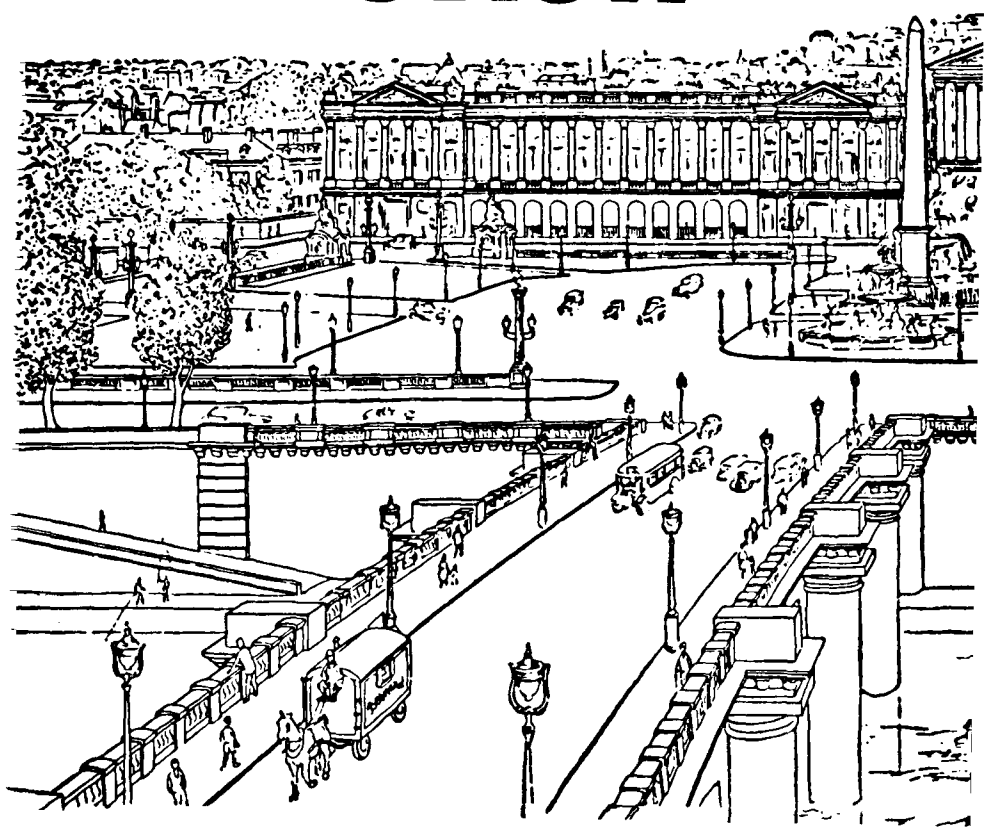

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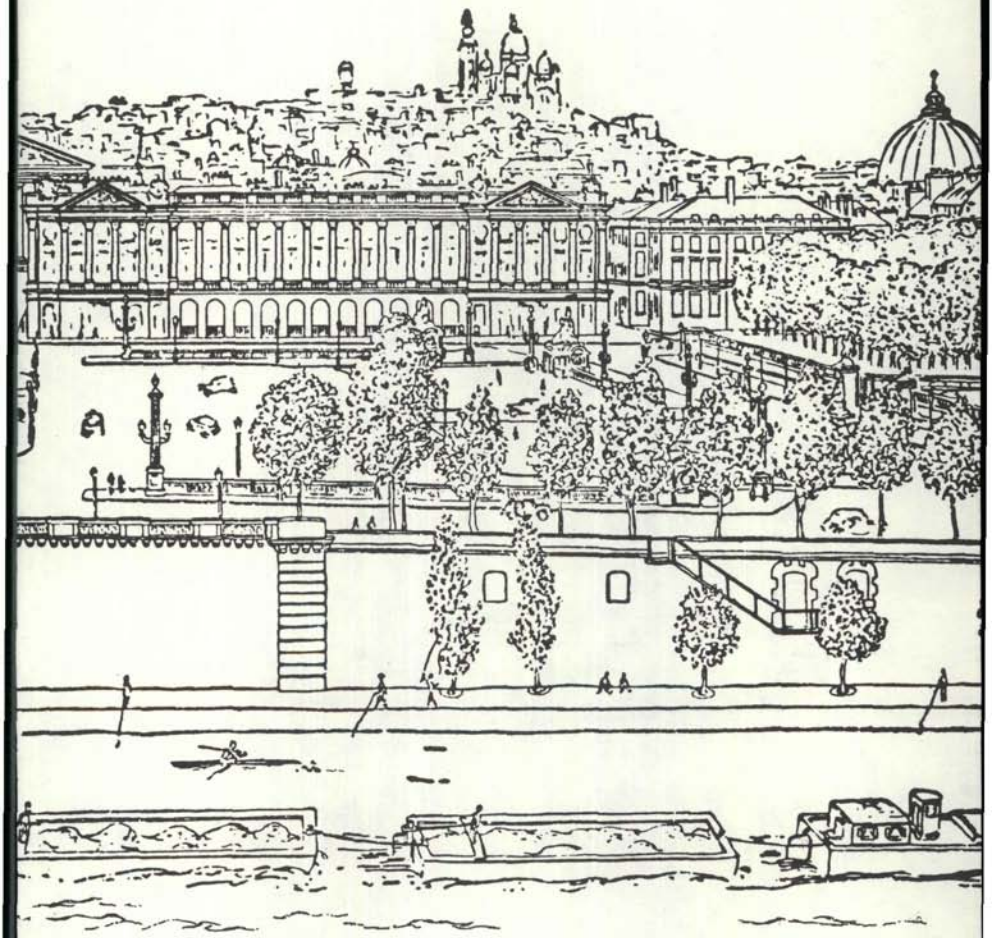

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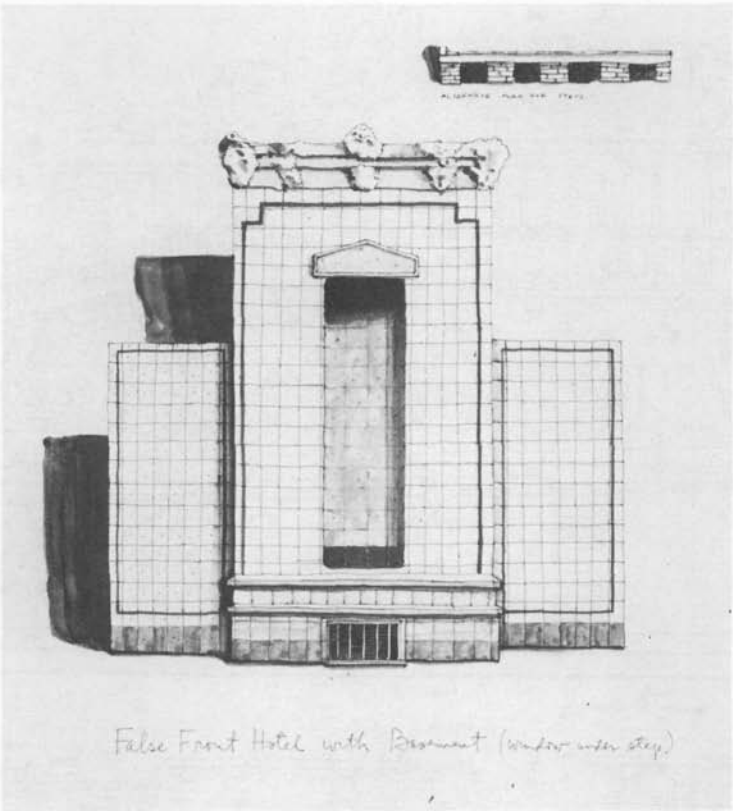

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Interviews

David Ignatow	*The Art of Poetry XIII*	54
Peter Levi	*The Art of Poetry XIV*	120
Jean Rhys	*The Art of Fiction LXIV*	218

Feature

David Plante	*Jean Rhys: A Remembrance*	238

Fiction

André de Mandiargues	*The Bath of Madame Mauriac*	100
David Evanier	*The One Star Jew*	168
Norman Lock	*The Love of Stanley Marvel & Claire Moon*	18

Art

Michael Hurson	*Pencil Drawings*	117
Robert Kushner	*Aïda*	160
Richard Thompson	*Honest Work*	47

Poetry

Jean Follain	*Eleven Poems*	155
Kenneth King	*Word Raid*	210
Peter Klappert	*Mathew's Other Love Song*	114
Pier Paolo Pasolini	*The Ashes of Gramsci*	34
Louis Simpson	*Sway*	110
John Wynne	*Two Struggling Actresses*	103
	Notes on Contributors	285

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The Love Of Stanley Marvel & Claire Moon

Norman Lock

1916.

It was the day of the boat races, and Stanley Marvel and his friend Rolly were there, sitting on a grassy bank overlooking the river. The river was brown. On it sped the thin bright shells of the rowing teams. Red, blue, green, and yellow boats coasted over the river. In the stern of each boat, a coxswain rocked, urging his team on through a megaphone strapped to his head. They could not hear what he said to inspire them in their furious paces, but Stanley Marvel secretly believed it was dirty stories.

Both he and his friend Rolly were alumni of one of the colleges whose boat crew raced towards the yellow rope stretched between row boats downriver. They were alumni of the Class of '15. It was Skimmer, an annual college spectacle, that had brought them to sit on the grass.

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Haberdashery.

Rolly wore a striped jacket, boiled white shirt and collar. His school tie waved in the breeze from the river. Stanley Marvel wore his Varsity sweater emblazoned with the capital "P." Both men wore straw hats with round flat brims known as straw boaters or skimmers, white duck trousers, and pearl gray spats. Both men sported pencil-thin moustaches and gold pocket watches tied up to their waists by gold fobs and chains. Both wore hair oil which trickled down their collars in the summer heat.

From time to time they took swigs from flat silver pocket flasks. Between races they read newspaper accounts of the game played the day before between the New York Giants and the Boston Braves.

Conversation on the Bank.

They had little to say to each other.

But suddenly Rolly said, "There's some loveliness over there by the pro bonum publico."

Stanley Marvel turned down a corner of the paper and looked out.

"That was a very accurate observation: there is certainly loveliness over there. And I think I shall go speak to it."

"You go ahead and I will see what happens."

Claire Moon: An Inventory.

white linen pleated dress
white, high-necked shirtwaist
white chemise ("shimmy") w/pink ribbons
black cotton stockings
black kid boots
black wide-brimmed hat
a string of dimestore pearls (Woolworth's, 79¢)

strawberry blonde hair

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green eyes w/gold flecks (''pretty eyes'')
upturned nose
small mouth
small breasts w/large, pink aureoles
slender (''waspish'') waist
narrow hips
a beauty mark on the inside of the left thigh
2 legs
2 arms
2 hands
2 feet
10 fingers
10 toes
32 teeth

Claire Moon: Health.
''Cornfed''

Her Statement.

''I was riding the trolley car on my way home from Gimbels. I'm a sales girl there, in lingerie. Today was my Saturday to work. Well I sat on the river side like I always do to look at the boats. And it looked so cool there by the river. So when the trolley stopped to give the horses a drink, I thought I'd just get off and have a nice cold drink of water from the fountain by the horse trough and then go and have a look at the boats.''

They Meet Watching Boats.

Stanley looked up from the newspaper. A lovely girl leaned over the stone trough and filled a tin cup. She had removed her hat and with a dampened handkerchief was mopping her forehead and neck. Her forehead was high and wide; her eyes set rather far apart.

Stanley Marvel tipped his skimmer and said ''hello.''

''My name is Stanley Marvel,'' he said.

She said nothing but instead looked away to where a shell

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from the Vesper Boat Club sliced through the river.

"Do you like the races?" he asked. He was confident with shopgirls.

"Yes," she offered.

"Those boats there, with the crimson and blue bands slanting diagonally on their hulls, represent my alma mater."

"Oh, you're a University man!" she said.

He pointed to the capital "P" made of thick felt sewn onto the chest of his college sweater.

"Would you care for a lemonade?"

"That would be nice," she said.

They bought lemonade and cakes in the basement of one of the boat houses. Then they went and strolled along the pavement which followed the river and looked at the boats, sliding crisply through the dark river as the sun dropped behind the heroic statue of the Union Soldier on Horseback.

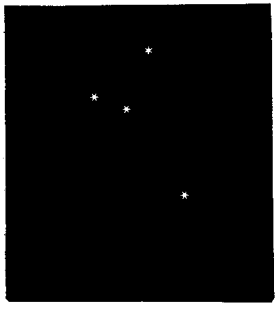
Fireworks.

And then all was dark

Stanley Marvel held Claire Moon's hand in the darkness.

There were around them little fires where the racing crews and their girls cooked hot dogs.

Someone played "Where the Mountains Meet the Moon" on a ukulele.



Suddenly fireworks. Over the black river. Showers of bright sparks. Pinwheels of flame. Whoosh. In the light of the fireworks they could see the boat crews putting their boats away in the boat houses. *Bang.* Claire Moon moved into Stanley Marvel's arms and was enfolded there.

Conversation in the Dark on Boathouse Row.

"I am a rising young man. I have my own business—the butter and egg business. I have a truck and there are not

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many men in the butter and egg business who have a truck.

"Would you care to take a ride? I have a can of milk that should still be nice and cool. You could drink milk and ride in the truck. I'll drive you home."

Riding through the City at Night.

Stanley Marvel guided his butter and egg truck through the park and into the street. On Dauphain Street, Negroes sat on steps drinking and laughing. Under a street lamp a man was retching.

Stanley Marvel: "We have given them a part of the city to live in. They should not soil it with the way they live."

Proposal of Marriage.

"And why not marriage between you and me?"

The Wedding Day: 9AM: His Toilet.

He scraped his cheeks with the Gillette and then swished it in the gray shaving water. The Gillette was heavy in his hand. Tiny whiskers marked where the shaving water lapped against the porcelain sink. They showed the high-water mark made each time the Gillette displaced its equal volume in water.

Bay Rum on his cheeks, neck, the back of the neck just where the hair begins, brushed into his hair with his fingers.

He brushed his hair with a pair of tortoise-shell military brushes. Hair oil. A rakish sweep of dark hair over his forehead achieved with a comb.

"I want a girl just like the girl. . . ."

Then he gargled thoroughly with Listerine.

9:25.

Rolly was downstairs. He wanted to take Stanley downtown

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to a taproom where he knew some girls so he would forget all about this wedding business. But Stanley wouldn't let him upstairs. Rolly left.

10 AM.

And then Stanley rode to the grocer's and bought two wooden boxes of big strawberries. He put these in the icebox of their new house. He also put a bottle of champagne on ice.

The Wedding.

Stanley Marvel: "It was over before I knew what happened. The organist played the Purcell thing and then next thing I knew I was knocking rice out of my hat. I wanted to walk out with Claire on my arm with a certain—dignity, like I was used to all the fanfare, but I forgot all about it. I may have shuffled out."

Rolly: "He shuffled out, the chump."

The Recessional.

Leaving the church, Stanley noticed his friend Rolly at the back. He was standing with some colored people. They were dressed flamboyantly. They each had one of the woven straw (rattan?) fans that had been donated to the church by a neighborhood funeral parlor. It was hot. Rolly and the colored people stole the fans.

Leaving the Church.

Rolly had tied the butter and egg truck to the orange fire plug. When Stanley and Claire pulled away from the church, waving to family and friends, the truck yanked the fire hydrant out of the pavement like a tooth. Water burst from the stump and fountained into the blue air.

Several well-wishers were soaked through to the skin. Stanley Marvel's mother dropped her flowers onto the pavement. They lay there, pink and white carnations, in a puddle.

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Rolly: "I did it because I wanted to marry Claire Moon myself. I'll break up this marriage yet."

Changing Clothes.

They drove to their new house and parked the butter and egg truck outside. Stanley carried Claire inside and kissed her. They sat in the kitchen eating strawberries and drinking champagne. Then they went upstairs and changed from their wedding clothes into their travelling clothes.

"Not yet, Stanley," said Claire as she went into the bathroom to change.

His Poem.

Stanley read Claire a poem through the bathroom door. The poem was called "A Vow" by Edgar Guest. It goes like this:

> I might not ever scale the mountain heights
> Where all the great men stand in glory now;
> I may not ever gain the world's delights
> Or win a wreath of laurel for my brow;
> I may not gain the victories that men
> Are fighting for, nor do a thing to boast of;
> I may not get a fortune here, but then,
> The little that I have I'll make the most of.

Honeymoon.

They stopped at the Haddon Hall in Atlantic City. There was a white bar of Clover Leaf Soap in the soap dish on the Belgian marble-topped sink. There was a clean water tumbler. There was also a small brownish bouquet of roses with a little card "From the Management."

"How thoughtful," said Claire.

She went into the bathroom to change. She wore a robe that reached the floor. She wore underpants with lace edging for her bridal night. She sat before the mirror at the hotel dresser and combed her hair 100 times. Stanley marveled at

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its length and shininess. He bent and sniffed at it.

"It smells like lilac, your hair does."

Claire smiled secretly. Then she unstoppered the bottle of Thelma, "Queen of Perfumes," her sister had given her for a wedding present. She moistened the heel of her hand with Thelma and dabbed the sweet fragrance onto her neck and temples.

Claire Moon's Portrait (I).

She left school after the tenth grade. She worked for a while as a filing clerk in the Contagious Hospital. In those days there were lepers behind the high stone walls. She worked next in a downtown department store as a sales girl.

Occasionally she bought fancy underdrawers. She was a virgin until her wedding night although she once permitted John Grabowski, an orderly in the Contagious Hospital, to put his hand under her shimmy.

She wanted several things in life:

1. to be married;
2. to have a motorcar;
3. to ride in an airplane.

Stanley Marvel promised her all three.

The Air Circus.

They went to the Air Circus outside Atlantic City. They drank a mixture of lemonade and beer and ate hot dogs while they looked at the sky. It was a cloudless day. Red, blue, green, and yellow bi-planes purred and putted above them. The airplanes banked and turned and dove at the grandstand and buzzed the fairgrounds. Clowns rode on the bottom wings, holding onto the struts.

Claire admired the dashing aviators. They had little moustaches, leather jackets and helmets, and long white scarves which snapped behind them as they bounced down the field and took off.

After the show, Stanley Marvel gave one of the aviators two dollars to take Claire and him up. They rode in a big circle.

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At one point they could see the Haddon Hall Hotel with its red tile roofs and green awnings and behind it the Atlantic Ocean. The ocean looked blue and flat. As the aviator turned his airplane toward the field, Stanley looked at the people milling about below him. From where he sat all the derbies looked like periods.

Claire Moon's Thoughts in the Airplane.

When the plane went up I felt this feeling between my legs, it tickled me and made me want to wet like on the rollercoaster. Suddenly we were in the air and I had another peculiar sensation. I was excited. My nipples got hard and the rough cotton of my shimmy rubbed against them. In the wind I felt like I was tugged at. I turned around and the pilot winked at me—I'm sure he did. His moustache was blond. His eyes were blue as the ocean. When we turned around to land I felt like all the men on the ground were looking up my dress.

Claire Moon's Portrait (II).

1. There is always the possibility that everything in her first portrait is false.

2. This possibility may mean Claire is more complex than we at first thought.

Hotel Breakfast.

Stanley and Claire went downstairs to breakfast. Breakfast at Haddon Hall was a very high-class affair. A waiter in black morning coat with velvet collar, waxed moustaches, and hair oiled to the top of his head showed them to their table. On the table were a white linen cloth, two white linen napkins

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rolled inside rings, a bowl of fruit, a cut glass vase of pinks, and a card. On the card someone had written in calligraphy with india ink:

Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Marvel.

A string quartet played chamber music in the big drawing room, through the double doors.

From where they sat they could see the ocean. Bright parasols paraded on the yellow boardwalk, escorted by bobbing skimmers. Prams and bicycles rattled over the boards. Kites with rag tails flew from the beach over the ocean and out just beyond the white-edged surf, small boats drifted at anchor while men in derbies and skimmers and ladies with parasols fished for the delicate, white-fleshed Wheatfish.

A waiter brought them iced water, silver, and the menu.

MENU

Orange juice

buttered toast

eggs (shirred, fried or scrambled)

bacon,
sausage
or Philadelphia Scrapple

baked scrod

fried potatoes

& coffee or tea

As they ate they listened to the string quartet; admired the quiet precision of the black-coated and oiled waiters moving

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among the tables with deference and the assuredness of people who know how to behave in opulent surroundings; watched the men and women promenade the boardwalk; watched the boats at anchor lift and settle on the ocean's heave, the sudden bounding of a sailboat; and caught the occasional flash of sun against a fish's belly as it was reeled in and netted.

Stanley Marvel looked up from his eggs and started. Rolly stood over them, tall and blond, elegant in white linen suit and pink tie.

Disruption of the Breakfast Airs of Morning.

Stanley Marvel was not pleased to see his friend Rolly.

1. He hadn't forgiven him for tying his Ford truck to the fire plug.
2. He resented his attempts the day before to lure him to a taproom and easy girls on his wedding day.
3. He was shocked that Rolly had brought colored people to the Presbyterian church and had stolen the fans.
4. He wanted to be alone with Claire.
5. He secretly feared Rolly's power over women.
6. He hated his pink tie.

"I would be pleased if you'd leave immediately," he said.

Rolly drew on the white linen cloth with a finger nail, looking all the while at Claire. Claire blushed deeply at the throat and looked at Stanley. Rolly pushed back his chair and stood up.

"All right. But I promise you this: I will take Claire one of these days and I'll kill you, Stanley Marvel, if you try to stop me."

Stanley knew Rolly was capable of killing him.

Rolly: A Portrait.

Rolly came from a big stone house. There was a gravel drive in the shape of a half-moon in front of the house, and automobiles were always parked there. Not black Fords but red

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Double Berlines, cream Renault Petit Ducs with green trim, yellow Rolland Pilain's, and white Peugeot Double Phaetons with red leather seats.

There were servants and Rolly would sleep with one of the maids when he came home from vacation.

He loved to hunt: he and his father had gone shooting out West with Teddy Roosevelt when Rolly was a boy. He liked the company of violent men. He boxed and fenced at the University. He flew his own plane. His father had taught him to shoot a dueling pistol with deadly skill. His father had killed two men. Rolly loved his father.

He was cruel to women: he had beaten a girl in his rooms but his father prevented the incident from becoming a scandal by a large endowment made to the University. The Modern Language building bears his name.

He dressed in flashy clothes, enjoyed appearing in bad taste. He wore French cologne. His underwear was monogramed and women loved him.

The Call-up: 1916.

Luckily for Stanley, there was a war. Rolly enlisted in the Army Air Corps. A few months later, Stanley Marvel was drafted into the Signal Corps. He trained at Fort Lee, Virginia, and was sent from there directly to France without leave and without a Great Coat. He received his Great Coat when he disembarked from the troop ship, in New York City, in 1918.

Stanley Marvel at War.

"It's a heck of a war!"

Postcard from the Front.

Dear Claire,

We are in the Argonne Forest. I am in a rest area so do not worry. The Sergeant says there's nothing to it and we'll be home by Christmas. I saw some very fine French cows this morning on a little farm. It made me think of the butter and

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egg business. I hope you are well and getting out once in a while with friends. I miss you.

Love,
Your husband Stanley

Stanley Marvel: A Portrait.

Stanley Marvel was over six-feet tall. His father was an ingot straightener in a steel town, and Stanley won a scholarship because of the things he could do with basketballs. He liked to be cheered by the crowd more than he liked basketball.

He was someone who needed to be liked. He hated unpleasantness. He didn't understand why Rolly was making things unpleasant for him.

He didn't know how to fight and if left to himself would have guided the enemy's bayonet for him into his own vitals. Lucky for him he never got near a German.

He loved girls and still believed a beautiful girl was the source of all art and was the song of the world. He would have grovelled at Claire's feet to have something to worship and to prove that she, as a woman, was worthy of adoration.

While Stanley Marvel was in a Trench,

Stanley Marvel sat in a trench, quaking. He sat on a board to keep the seat of his pants dry. His feet were in the mud. It was raining. His shoes were wet. His puttees were wet and unravelled. The blanket he had around him was wet. It smelled like a wet blanket. Stanley hadn't had a change of clothes for three weeks and so his clothes smelled, too.

He was quaking because he was wet and cold and because of the aerial bombardment. The aerial bombardment had been going on for three days without stop. It had finally gotten on Stanley's nerves. Bad nerves made him quake with each concussion. He could feel each concussion in his ears. They hurt him but he let them hurt: he could not keep his

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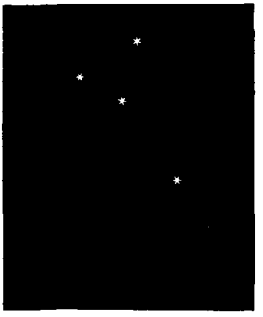
ears covered anymore. His nerves were too bad and he just sat there on his piece of board, in the mud, quaking.

He thought he would like to have a cigar.

He thought the sight of the aerial bombardment was very pretty. He thought it looked just like the fireworks over the river the night he met Claire Moon.

"I'll put electricity in the house when I get home," he thought.



Claire was at a Party;

While Stanley Marvel sat in his trench and quaked, Claire was at a party. She wore a pink summer dress and low white shoes. Her strawberry blonde hair was unraveling from its knot on her head. She looked very pretty. Her white gloves were in her purse and she was drinking champagne cocktails, one after another. She scandalized her friends by coming to the party in a motorcar with a handsome slacker who was floorwalker in the furniture department.

"I want to have some fun," she said.

Rolly was in the Air.

While Stanley Marvel sat in his trench and quaked and Claire was at a party with a slacker having fun, Rolly was in a Jenny going loop-the-loop to escape the German tri-wing on his tail. There was very little night-flying done then but Rolly was doing it.

The struts hummed and Rolly's white silk scarf crackled.

"I will get Claire as soon as I get home," he thought. "I will spread her delicious white limbs on my bed and get her."

Then Rolly crashed.

Then Rolly was sent to the field hospital.

Then Rolly's left arm was amputated.

Then Rolly's left sleeve was pinned up.

And after a time he went home.

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Armistice.

And then the war was over.

Demobilization.

Stanley Marvel was put in a troop ship and sent home. After crossing the Atlantic in eight days, he was put off the ship at New York Harbor. The ship bumped against the dock. They gave him a Great Coat. It was brand new. He wore his Great Coat as they marched to the Armory. It was summer. Then he was mustered out.

Reunion.

Stanley Marvel got home to Philadelphia. He came by train and walked along Broad Street in his uniform and Great Coat. People were sick of seeing soldiers.

"Hey, buddy, the war's over!" they yelled.

"Get a decent job!" they yelled.

He stood in the living room of his house and said "Is anybody home?"

Claire was at the movies with the handsome slacker who was no longer a slacker now that the war was over: he was manager of the furniture department.

Abduction.

Several weeks later Rolly forced his way into Stanley Marvel's house and shot Stanley in the knee with an Army pistol.

"That's for you," he said.

"And you're for me," he said to Claire.

He took Claire outside and pushed her into a motorcar driven by a confederate he had engaged while in the Army hospital. The confederate had his right arm pinned up and together they drove the motorcar to the airfield.

Rolly and Claire were flying to Canada in Rolly's airplane when the accident occurred.

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Strange Accident. *

Aug. 29. One of the strangest accidents known to aviation caused the deaths of Rolly Wincapaw, well known playboy and flying ace, and Claire Moon Marvel of Philadelphia. Wincapaw was piloting his Fokker T-2 over Lake George when a gust of wind wrapped the lady's skirt around the "joy stick," or control column. Frantic efforts to disentangle it failed, and in a wild swoop the airplane struck the water with terrific impulse. A sliver from a wing strut pierced the pilot's skull and the unconscious Mrs. Marvel was drowned.

☐ *Conclusion (I).*

Claire made no resistance during Rolly's abduction of her, and was secretly glad.

☐ *Conclusion (II).*

Claire made heroic resistance against her abductor and entangled the joy stick with her dress rather than dishonor her husband.

or

☐ Who's to say?

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Pier Paolo Pasolini

The Ashes of Gramsci

I

It isn't May-like, this impure air
which darkens the foreigners' dark
garden still more, then dazzles it

with blinding sunlight. . . this foam-
stroked sky above the ocher roof
terraces which in vast semicircles veil

Tiber's curves and Latium's cobalt
mountains. . . Inside the ancient walls
the autumnal May diffuses a deathly

peace, disquieting like our destinies,
and holds the whole world's dismay,
the finish of the decade that saw

Note by Pasolini: Gramsci is buried in a small grave in Rome's English Cemetery between Saint Paul's Gate and Testaccio, not far from Shelley's grave. Written on his stone is the simple inscription: "Cinera Gramsci"—followed by the dates.

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the profound naive effort to make
life over collapse amid ruins;
silence, humid, fruitless. . .

Young man, in that May when to err meant
one was still alive, in that Italian May
which at least gave life fire, you,

so much less thoughtless and impurely sane
than our fathers—but not father: rather, humble
brother—even then with your thin hand, you

were sketching the ideal that illuminates
(but not for us: you, dead, and we
dead too with you in this humid garden)

this silence. You must know you can't do
anymore than rest, confined even now
in this extraneous earth. Patrician

ennui surrounds you. And all that reaches you
is the faded hammer blow on an anvil
from the workshops of Testaccio, drowsy

in the evening, with its shacks of poverty, its
naked piles of tin cans and scrap iron, where
singing, leering, an apprentice already is

ending his day, while the last raindrops fall.

II

Between the two worlds, the truce in which
we don't exist. Choices, allegiances. . .
By now their only sound is this bleak

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noble garden's, where the deceit that
diminished life stubbornly persists in death.
In the circles of the sarcophagi,

on these grey, low, stately
stones, secular epitaphs announce
only the surviving fates of secular

people. The bones of millionaires
from mightier nations are still burning
with unrestrained passions, without scandal.

Never completely vanishing, the ironies
of princes and pederasts ceaselessly
buzzing, their bodies in their scattered urns

though merely ashes now, remain impure.
The silence of death testifies here
to a civil silence of men who still are

men, to a tedium, which, in the Park's
tedium, discreetly changes; and
the uncaring city, enclosing the monotonous

silence with slums and churches, here,
impious in its piety, loses its splendor.
Its earth, rich with nettles and clover,

nourishes these thin cypresses, this black
humidity that stains the walls behind
pale contorted boxwood, which the reassuring

evening extinguishes into unembellished
inklings of seaweed . . . this sparse, scentless
grass, into which, with a shiver

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of mint or rotten hay, the violet
twilight sinks, quietly foreshadowing
with daylight melancholy the night's

exhausted trepidations. Harsh
the climate, sweet the history of the earth
within these walls, earth mixing with

other earth; this moisture
recalling other moisture; and—familiar
from latitudes and horizons

where English glades crown lakes lost
in the heavens amid meadows green as
phosphorescent billiard tables or

emeralds: "And O ye Fountains..."—ring out the pious
invocations...

III

A scrap of red cloth, like those the Partisans
knotted up around their necks
and, near the urn, on the waxen earth,

a different red of two geraniums.
There you lie, banished, listed with severe
non-Catholic elegance, among the foreign

dead: The Ashes of Gramsci...Between hope
and my old distrust, I approach you,
chancing upon this thinned-out greenhouse, before

your tomb, before your spirit, still alive
down here among the free. (Or it's
something else, perhaps more ecstatic, even

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humbler: an intoxicated, adolescent
symbiosis of sex and death. . .)
And in this land where your passion never

rested, I feel how wrong
—here, among the quiet of these graves—
and yet how right—in our unquiet

fate—you were, as you drafted your final
pages in the days of your murder.
Here, attesting to the still-not-dispersed

seeds of their ancient domination, are these
dead men attached to an avarice
which buries its grandeur and abomination

deep in the centuries; and at the same time,
attesting to its end: obsessed
striking of anvils, stifled, softly

grieving, coming from the humble quarter.
And here am I. . . poor, dressed in
clothes that the poor admire in store

windows for their crude splendors
and that filthy back streets and tram
benches (which daze my day)

have faded; while, less and less often, these
moments come to me to interrupt my torment
of staying alive; and if I happen

to love the world, it's an ingenuous
violent sensual love, just as I
hated it when I was a confused

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adolescent and its bourgeois evils
wounded my bourgeois self; and now, divided—
with you—doesn't the world—or at least

that part which holds power—seem worthy only
of rancor and an almost mystical contempt?
Yet without your rigor, I survive because

I do not choose. I live in the non-will
of the dead postwar years: loving
the world I hate, scorning it, lost

in its wretchedness—in an obscure scandal
of consciousness...

IV

The scandal of contradicting myself, of being
with you and against you; with you in my heart,
in light, but against you in the dark viscera;

traitor to my paternal state
—in my thought, in the shadows of action—
I know I'm attached to it, in the heat

of the instincts, of aesthetic passion;
attracted to a proletarian life
that came before you; for me it is a religion,

its joy, not its millennial
struggle; its nature, not its
consciousness. Only the originating force

of man, which he lost in becoming man,
could give it this intoxicating
nostalgia, this poetic light—and more

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I don't know how to say than what is
just but not sincere, abstract
love, not grieving fellow-feeling. . .

Poor as the poor I cling
like them, to humiliating hopes;
like them, each day I nearly kill myself

to live. But though
desolated, disinherited
I possess (and it's the most exalting

bourgeois possession of all) the most
absolute condition. But while I possess history,
it possesses me. I'm illuminated by it;

but what's the use of such light?

V

I'm not speaking of the individual, that
phenomenon of sensual and sentimental ardors. . .
he has other vices; nor will I speak

of the name of his sin or its fatal destiny. . .
But oh the common prenatal vices
and the indisputable sins enmeshed

deep inside him. The actions, internal
external, that incarnate him in life
are not immune to those

religions that in life mortgage
death, established to deceive
the light and shed light on the deceit.

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His remains are destined to be
buried in the municipal cemetery; his
struggle with them is Catholic: Jesuitical

the manias by which he prepares his heart;
and still deeper within: biblical is
the cunning of his consciousness. . . ironic

the liberal ardor. . . crass the brightness—alongside
the aversions of a provincial dandy, of
provincial normality. . . Down to the minutest trifles,

where Authority and Anarchy vanish
into animal depths. . . Secure
against impure virtue and intoxicated sin,

defending an obsessive ingenuousness—
and with what conscience!—thus lives the I: I
alive, eluding life, while the feeling grows

of a life becoming grieving
violent oblivion. . . Ah how well
I understand, mute in the wind's wet

humming, here where Rome is mute,
among wearily agitated cypresses,
next to you, Spirit whose inscription reads

Shelley. . . How well I understand the vortex
of feelings, the capricious fate (Grecian
in the aristocratic Northern traveler's

heart) which swallowed him in the dazzling
turquoise Tyrrhenian Sea; the carnal
joy of adventure, aesthetic

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and boyish—while prostrate Italy,
as though inside the belly of an enormous
cicada, bursts open with white coastlines

in Latium brushed here and there with veiled
swarms of baroque pines and delicate
yellow glades of heather, where a young

peasant dozes, penis swollen
among his rags, a Goethean dream. . . Coastlines
in Maremma darkened by stupendous pools

of adders' tongue, in which the hazel bush
is sharply etched, along footpaths the shepherd
unknowingly fills to the brim with his youth.

Blindly fragrant coastlines in Versilia
whose drying curves expose to the blind
entangled sea the terse stuccoes

and light marquetries of its
paschal, completely human countryside,
darkened on the Cinquale, unraveling

at the foot of the torrid Apuan
Alps, glasslike blues on pink. . .
Landsliding coastlines convulsed as though by

a panic of fragrance on the steep, languid
Riviera, where sun struggles with breeze
to confer supreme suavity upon the sea's

oils. . . And everywhere the boundless
percussion instrument of sex and light
hums joyfully: so used is Italy to it

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she doesn't even tremble, as though
dead in her life; fervently,
young men with tan sweaty faces

shout the name of their comrade, from
hundreds of ports, among the Riviera's
people, in backyard cardoon gardens,

on small filthy beaches...

Will you ask me, unadorned dead man,
to abandon this desperate
passion to be in the world?

VI

I'm leaving, leaving you in the evening
which though sad descends so sweetly
for us the living, as its waxen light

coagulates in the twilit quarter.
And stirs it, makes it everywhere larger,
emptier, and, in the distance, rekindles it

with yearning life, which, using harsh
rumbling trams and human shouts
in dialect, performs a faintly heard, absolute

concert. And you feel—like those distant
beings, who in life shout and laugh
in those vehicles of theirs, in those bleak

tenements where the untrustworthy expansive
gift of existence is consumed—
this life is only a shiver:

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corporeal collective presence:
you feel the lack of any true
religion: not life but survival

—maybe happier than life—as with
a people of animals in whose arcane
explosive excitement there is no other passion

than for daily work: humble fervor
that gives a festive air to
humble corruption. The emptier each

ideal—in this vacuum of history,
in this buzzing pause when life is
silent—the more obvious the awesome,

ancient, almost Alexandrian
sensuality, which impurely decorates
everything with golden light when here

in the world something collapses and the world
drags itself along in the twilight that's reentering
the empty piazzas, the disheartened workshops...

The streetlamps have awakened, studding
Via Zabaglia, Via Franklin, the entire
Testaccio, naked with its lurid

hill, the streets along the Tiber, and across
the river, the black backdrop that Monteverde
amasses then disperses invisibly into the sky...

Diadems of light losing themselves
dazzling, cold, with almost
sea-like sadness...It's nearly suppertime;

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the quarter's few buses shine with clusters
of workers clinging to their doors, while
bunches of soldiers stroll, not hurrying,

toward the hill, which conceals amid rotten
excavations and dry mounds of garbage
the shadowy nests of whores waiting

angrily atop that aphrodisiac
filth; and not far away, near illegal
shacks next to the Mount or surrounded

by buildings that are nearly worlds, boys
light as rags play in the breeze,
no longer cold, of springtime; burning with

juvenile thoughtlessness, dark adolescents
whistleight as rags play in the breeze,
no longer cold, of springtime; burning with

juvenile thoughtlessness, dark adolescents
whistle their native Roman night of May
along the sidewalks of the evening

feast; and garages' rolling shutters
roar down joyously when the dark
has made the evening serene, and among

the plane trees in Piazza Testaccio,
the wind, dying with shivers of storms,
is good and sweet, though grazing the coarse hairs

and tufa of the Slaughterhouses, it becomes
soaked in rotten blood and everywhere
agitates the refuse and odor of poverty.

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It is a dim hum, life, and those lost
in it serenely lose it, if their
hearts are filled with it. Here they are,

the wretched enjoying the evening. And potent
in them, the defenseless, through them, the myth
is reborn. . . But I with the conscious heart

of one who can live only in history,
will I ever again be able to act with pure passion
when I know that our history is finished?

Translated by Norman MacAfee and
Luciano Martinengo
1954

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portfolio

"Honest Work"

Richard Thompson

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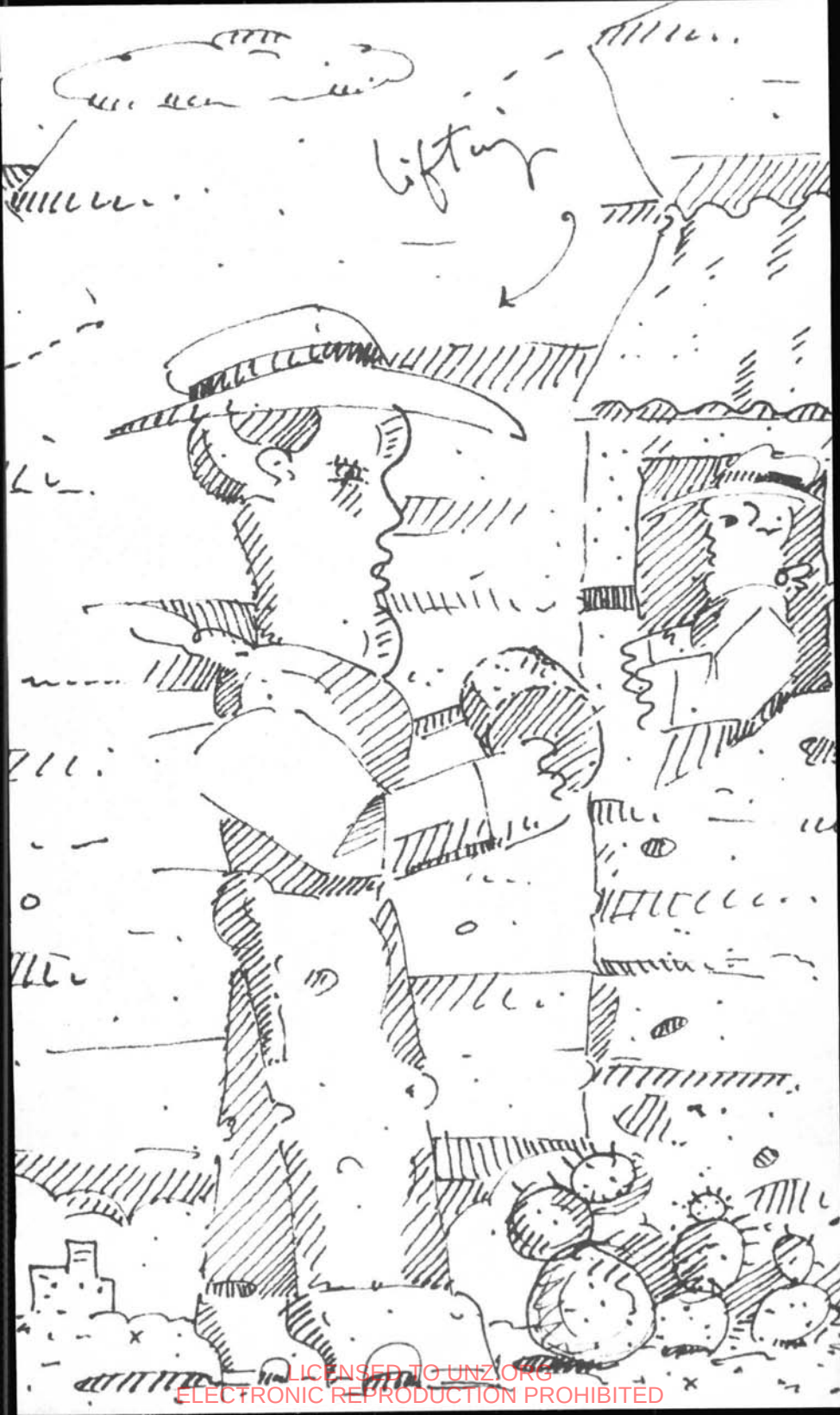

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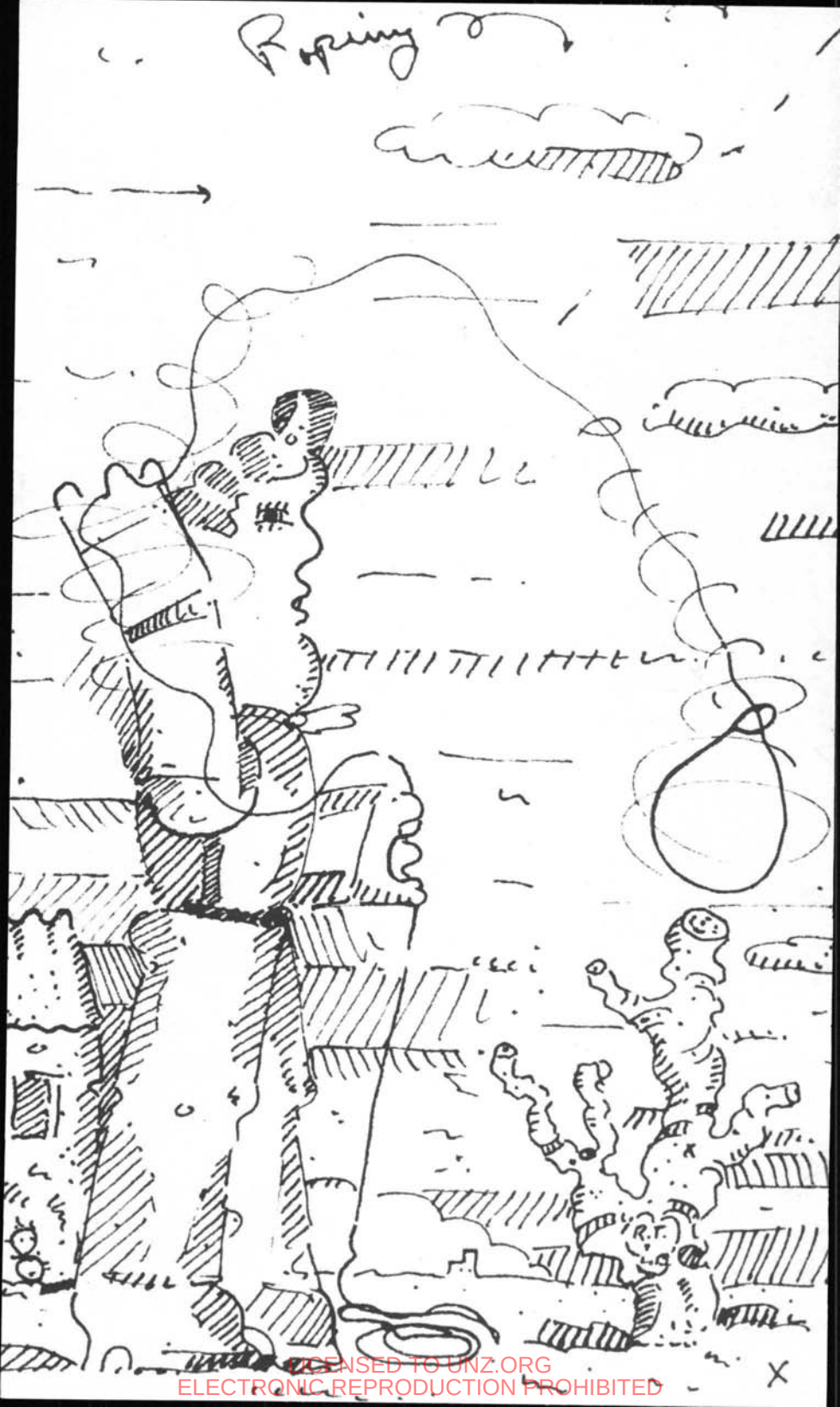

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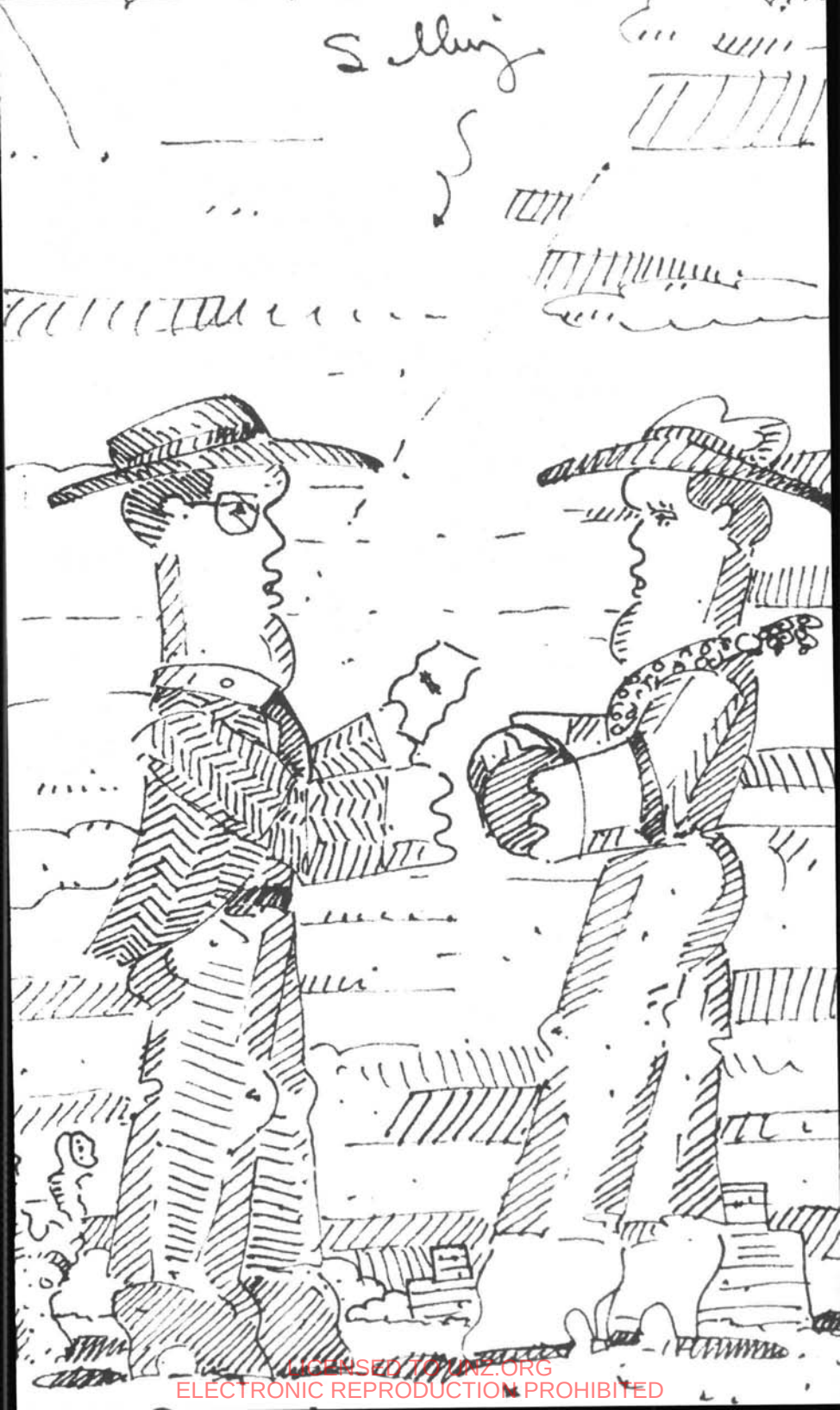

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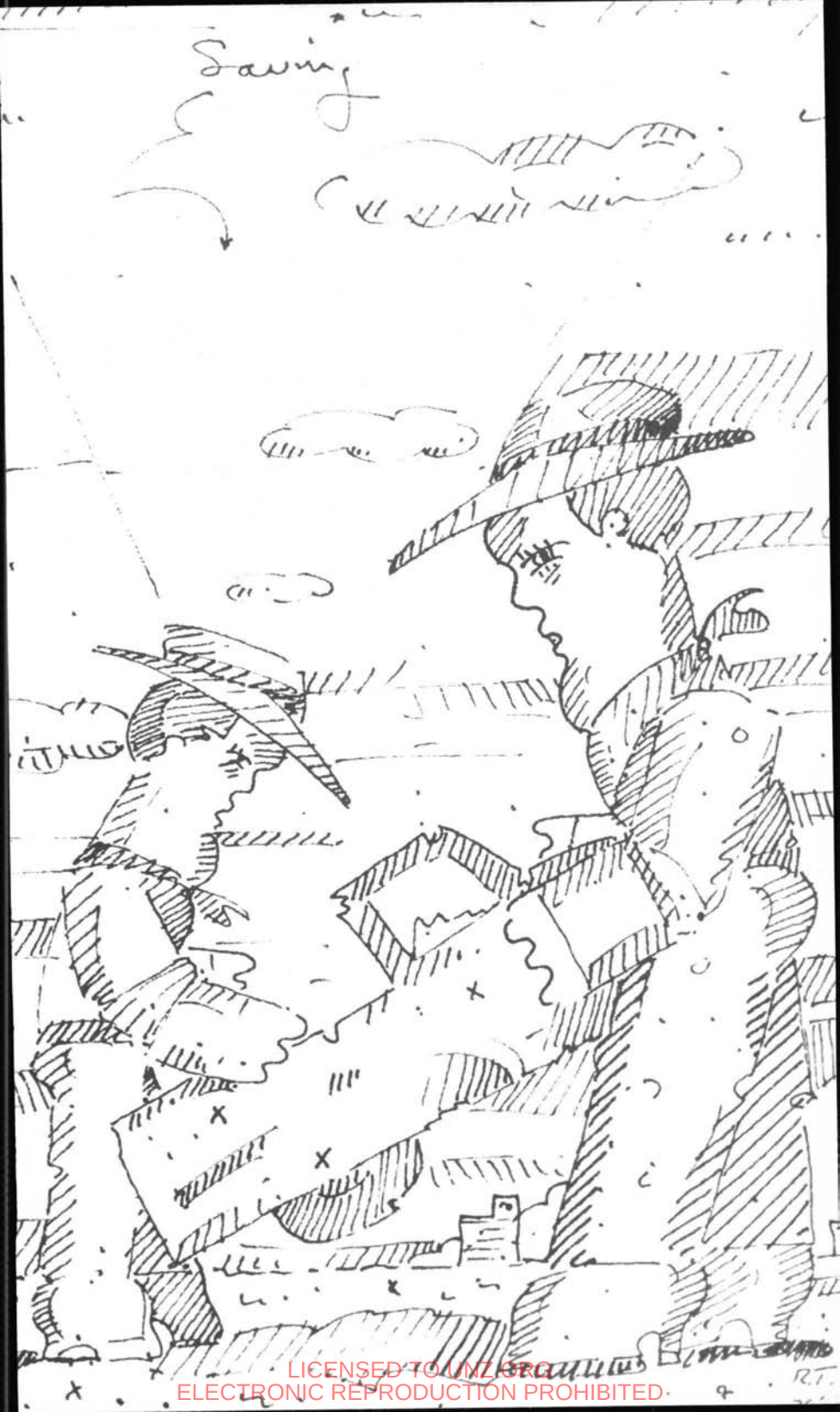

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I ~~think we can~~ live admiring the sky

~~and the mountains~~ and loving ~~the~~ day

and ~~the~~ night, so glad ~~that~~ they ~~live~~ with ~~us~~,

~~our~~ eyes open, ~~our~~ nostrils breathing air

and our ~~legs~~ on ~~earth~~ beside the ~~xxx~~lakes

the sea sound of ~~our~~ heart's beating

~~a sea ship~~ at anchor up and down

in the slow swell, ~~our~~ ~~lives~~ worth an ocean

or many lakes, ~~our~~ ~~lives~~ oceanlike

beside a lake looking into the distance

I am brother to the tree

runner with the rabbit who twitches his ears

in the silence. I cannot figure my ~~own~~ cost,

not in terms of money as I count the wind

that wraps around ~~me~~. Include the sun

~~I am~~ very high priced and ~~xxxx~~ on my death

the world will go broke

~~for in me will~~ have ~~been~~ ~~xxx~~ poured ~~all its treasure~~

and ~~xx~~desolate the sun ~~xxxxxxx will~~ stand

~~as~~ empty as the wind.

I live admiring the sky
and the mountains and loving
the day and the night, so glad
they are with me, my eyes open,
my nostrils breathing air,
my feet bind the lakes
the sea sound of my heart's beating
a ship at anchor up and down
in the slow swell, my life
worth an ocean, or many lakes
looking into the distance
(over)

A David Ignatow manuscript page.

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Gerard Malanga

David Ignatow
The Art of Poetry XIII

David Ignatow keeps an apartment in Queens close to York College where he teaches—four small rooms with bare walls. The windows of the living-room look out on a quaint cemetary dating back to the late 1700s. On its far side runs the BMT Jamaica subway line, one of the few remaining elevated trains; every so often one hears the sound of the train approaching the 168th Street station. The sparseness of the apartment does not suggest poverty, but nor are there indications of an aesthetically enriched life: Ignatow has no study. He maintains a modest library, two or three filing-cabinets, and a typewriter, all in the bedroom.

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Mr. Ignatow, who is now in his early sixties, has grown a prominent silver-white moustache over the past few years which has served to tone down what was a rather severe demeanor. His voice is somewhat high-pitched and hoarse, with little of the accent one would assume from a Brooklyn upbringing.

The poet is a singular instance of a man rising to eminence late in life. He tried for years to be a businessman, a career for which he was not suited. He wrote poems during this time, and much that he observed with a photographer's eye of everyday life in the business world is incorporated in his writing. At first, his career as a poet was no more successful than his business practice. A study of his Notebooks *indicates the struggle against academic jealousies and prejudice, and the neglect and hostility of his contemporaries, especially in the forties. Now it appears his time has come. He has written and published, never with great success, but with an increasing reputation (his last last two books are* Facing the Tree, *1975, and* Tread the Dark, *1978) which has brought him honors including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Bollingen Prize, and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters "for a lifetime of creative achievement."*

INTERVIEWER

Do you consider yourself vulnerable?

IGNATOW

Vulnerable, damn right. But the fear of being vulnerable prompts me into bringing myself forward. It's like being on the battlefield. As you engage in battle, you begin to feel fear; but as you make contact with the enemy, he's almost your friend because he's reducing the fear to excitement and participation. In *Facing the Tree* there's a poem about Croatian guerrillas who are being executed, and they keep identifying with the executioner. It's strange. It's terribly ironical.

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INTERVIEWER

In your poems where you show your anger do you feel a danger in having your vulnerability misunderstood?

IGNATOW

I couldn't care less. This is what I have to feel, this is what I have to write. This is the life, this is the life. I'm living it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel "visceral" is an accurate description of your poetry?

IGNATOW

Very much so. My poetry is a gut reaction. I've lived a gut life for so many years, and I guess I still do. When we talk of the gut, I mean literally sometimes being worried where I'm going to get the money for the next rent. Always living on the fucking edge.

INTERVIEWER

Anthony Burgess said "The scientific approach to life is not really appropriate to states of visceral anguish..."

IGNATOW

That's very good. Visceral anguish is really survivor's experience, he who fights his way back from the edge of a cliff or burrows his way out of a locked cage, out of the coal mine...a perpetual struggle.

INTERVIEWER

What is the worst thing that could happen to you?

IGNATOW

Well...losing my job, being out of money. Problems of love, problems of human relationships are secondary. Emotional problems have a way of resolving themselves.

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INTERVIEWER

You write in the *Notebooks* that pain is your favorite subject. Do you still believe that?

IGNATOW

I have probably passed that point in my life. Things have changed. I don't intend to go on living a life of pain and celebrating pain. I have experienced a tremendous joy in the last three years. I've been fantastically happy in long spurts. This is something I haven't had for many years.

INTERVIEWER

Over the years, you seem to have become more preoccupied with prose poems. Does this visual change in your work correspond to the way you've changed your life? Have you become impatient, or more patient with yourself?

IGNATOW

Well, the lyric has limitations. I've found myself impatient with the lyric form. And that's the reason I changed my style, a rebellion against the traditional, contemporary, lyric form, of, say, William Carlos Williams. I had had it that way. I found my language was responding to the form rather than to my sensibilities. I was getting a little too self-conscious about it. So I decided: Cut loose and give emphasis to the imagination rather than to the line. By "imagination" I mean also the intelligence within the imagination, giving the intelligence its opportunity to explore the imagination as far as it will *go*. Of course it has a form, but it's a form which constantly renews itself because the intelligence is restless. Emotions tend to repeat themselves over and over again, whereas the intelligence is constantly renewing itself, recreating itself. Therefore, I feel in the prose poems the emphasis is on the intelligence with an undercurrent of emotion. In the lyric form the emphasis was on the emotion and the intellect was the undercurrent. I'm also following Pound's rule, that poetry

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should be as good as good prose. That it's a vernacular, colloquial thing. And vernacular, colloquial doesn't sing. It talks. If you want to sing, then you write an elevated line, an elevated language. Occasionally, I'll do that. There are moments. But, on the whole, the contemporary tradition is talking. And if that's the case, then why not come out and use the prose line?

INTERVIEWER

When you started to write, who were your chief influences?

IGNATOW

At first I was very pleased to model myself on Hart Crane. But then I knew I wasn't a Crane temperament; I felt much more closely aligned with Whitman, so I began to model myself on him. Then I found that I couldn't quite grasp the Whitman thing because he was just a little too euphoric for me. So I went away from him and I went to Williams. Williams repelled me at first. He repelled me because he was so . . . I felt he was so *literal*, so prosy. "Where is the poetry in all this?" I kept thinking. And then all the praise he was getting from people had me hanging on the ropes. I said, "I've got to come back and read him again." So I kept going back and reading him. And I was finding myself in experiences which were shockingly similar to the experiences he was recounting in his work. And when I started to write these experiences, I saw that I was using his techniques. There was no choice. But then, my life diverged from his in many respects. First of all, he was a physician. And my life-style went in the opposite direction. So I began to reshape the technique according to *my* lifestyle. Then I met César Vallejo on the page and, boy, he flipped me out! Then, I said, "I'm going to let loose."

INTERVIEWER

Who have been some of your other influences?

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IGNATOW

I learned the surrealist technique from Russell Edson. Before I read him I had made a jab at surrealist poetry and I dropped it very quickly, because my life became much too complicated and in need of direct confrontation to keep it simple. But later on I was reminded of my past attempts when I read Edson. I said *"Gee, I must try it again."* Then, as I said, Vallejo was very important to me, the intellectualization of *states of being* that I think characterizes his work. The extraordinary combination of the guts and the mind...how they get together and inform one another. He's a metaphysical poet. By metaphysical, I mean he's a man who's constantly seeking values. Neruda, too...the whole Spanish school of poetry gave me much to think about. They drew me away from the Whitman tradition and I thought myself freer ...freed of the Whitman tradition.

INTERVIEWER

And yet you're often characterized as the son of Whitman and Williams...

IGNATOW

I know, but I don't believe it altogether. I have a lot of bizarre, surrealistic, macabre images at work in my head. The ill curse of contemporary life. I think if Williams were alive today, he would've gone in that direction. As for Whitman, if you take him seriously you have to swallow the whole bit about man's divine origins and all men being equal. I reject that. I don't see it in practice, therefore it doesn't exist for me.

INTERVIEWER

So, you don't use Whitmanesque techniques any more.

IGNATOW

I still use some of his repetition, parallel structures, chanting, incantatory style...but it's more evident in my earlier

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work. It grows much tighter and more intellectual, more imagistic with the years because of my study of men like Neruda, Vallejo, Machado and the French poets.

INTERVIEWER

When you came upon the Surrealist poets, did you feel that the Whitman tradition had limitations for you that forced you to move on to the Surrealist poets?

IGNATOW

The limitation in the Whitman tradition was its openness to everything at a time when it seemed wrong to be open to everything. That is, to accept evil, the kind of evil that was going on, to believe that it could be transcended or transformed or used. I didn't think that any of this could happen. The pivot really is my turning toward the existentialist movement. . . I felt man ought to judge himself. . . there was no one else to appeal to, contrary to Whitman's work, that there is a final arbiter in life. I don't think so. An arbiter beyond the personal, beyond the individual. . . I don't believe it. But Whitman tried to straddle two concepts: the individual as a unique person with a strength of his own and the concept that beyond the individual, since he was of a divine source, was still a greater force towards which he was progressing to perfect himself. I had to throw all that out; I was left with the individual. That was it, which unraveled the whole Whitman tradition for me. Therefore I had to turn to other sources and other sensibilities. And these were men like Rimbaud and Baudelaire and Williams and the Spanish poets who dealt with pain—from suffering, from severe deprivation: mental, physical, social, universal. And yet they sought to expand their world. They sought to include the entire world in their pain and suffering and their anguish towards a freer life. The kind that Whitman sought for. . . the kind that Whitman *thought* he had, but, in other words, they were going through the door of life, whereas Whitman *thought* he had opened the front door.

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INTERVIEWER

A Mexican writer, Jose Gaos, was quoted in Octavio Paz's beautiful book *The Bow and the Lyre* as saying: "As soon as a man enters life he is already old enough to die."

IGNATOW

That's good. When you assume that knowledge you begin to live a very vital life, because everything you do is in the background of immortality. The background is the immortality of death. That's when you can say you are a man in the full sense of the word. You've become an existentialist. That's what it's all about.

INTERVIEWER

How old were you when you first began writing?

IGNATOW

About sixteen when I realized that I had some kind of gift.

INTERVIEWER

Were you excited because all of a sudden you realized that you were dealing with a secret language?

IGNATOW

No. I was able to make things vivid on the page. I could recreate, I could bring life to a page. That's what I was thinking about. To see my visions on paper almost exactly as I had visualized them, being read and viewed with pleasure the way I viewed them myself. That's what amazed me. I didn't *will* myself to become a writer. It was just a natural outgrowth of the pleasure readers got from my work. I wanted to give pleasure and give myself pleasure. It wasn't a dry fuck, in other words.

INTERVIEWER

Does it help you as a writer to go for long periods without sex?

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IGNATOW

Sexuality, in itself, is quite a distraction. It's an art in itself. It requires a very intense concentration, delicacy and nuance, and that takes a lot of practice. . . knowing the other person. If your time is limited, that *really* can cut into your writing. It's really a common problem. Our profession requires almost a total concentration of personality and the moment you start to divert yourself, you begin to lose your grip. . . and you drift, and you become quite irritable about it, too.

INTERVIEWER

In the *Notebooks* you say: "Being a poet is to know you do not exist by poetry." What does that mean?

IGNATOW

I guess, at some point. . . you have to think you exist for poetry. But if you remove love from your life or you remove, say, the financial security from your life, then you know that poetry plays a very minor role. This is the Age of Survival. That's the point. If life wasn't so dangerous, and we had a stable form of society, then I suppose poetry would play a more prominent role. When did I say that, by the way?

INTERVIEWER

1964.

IGNATOW

Well, I was going through some real shit problems then. Very heavy financial burdens. My business had collapsed. Not "my" business, the family business. I had sold it in 1962. After my father's death, I left myself out on a limb. I sold it for nothing! All I wanted was to get free of the whole entanglement.

INTERVIEWER

You seem profoundly energetic as a teacher of other poets, and also prolific as a poet in your own right. What is the relation between these activities?

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IGNATOW

Teaching poetry has stimulated me no end. At the beginning it was virtually an explosive experience! Because, as I had to get up there and discuss poetry, I was really, finally, articulating ideas that had remained unsaid in my mind. The whole thing illuminated my past and my present, and I found myself taking tremendous leaps forward as a writer.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel when someone imitates you?

IGNATOW

I'm uneasy.

INTERVIEWER

When you started writing poetry, were you interested in something like what John Wieners calls "the fellowship of poets"? Were you eager to meet a lot of poets?

IGNATOW

Very much so. I thought poets would be the ideal candidates for a community of spirits. I still had the Whitman thing in me. But the more I became familiar with poets, the more I recognized that they were limited human beings, like myself. I was extremely excited to see how different they were from me, which accounted for the difference in their poetry, too. So, I'm still interested in meeting poets. I like to talk with them. I like to feel them out. I like to read their work. But I'm not searching for myself in their work; I'm searching for something which affirms differences—creative differences—between us.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever feel lonely?

IGNATOW

Oh sure. I'm lonely most of the time. I'm always after

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company. I guess when I'm writing I feel I've suddenly made company with myself. You become your own guest.

INTERVIEWER

Or your own audience.

IGNATOW

Yes. And that's fine. That's very nice. Out of a day, that represents three or four hours at the most. There are times when I can find myself in a book, too, for two or three hours. But afterward I have such an urge to go out and reach for other people. Very often they're not around. There's also a metaphysical loneliness. We all feel it. The burden of living one's own life is experiencing sensations that no one else can share. You take a step in a house, you start moving around the house, no one else moves with you. You're walking by yourself.

INTERVIEWER

You're living alone? Do you prefer living alone, or would you rather have someone living with you?

IGNATOW

I'd like to have someone living with me. My family is out in Easthampton. We're separated for practical reasons. I have my work here; my office, my schoolwork. I travel out there on weekends. But when I'm there I get very restless because it's a totally isolated area. I've lived long enough in the country; I've done some nice things on the life lived among trees and rabbits and fox and geese . . . but now I want to come back and hear the gunfire and watch the drunks vomiting in the street and hear the buses roaring on the avenue. Actually I'm getting to the point, living here by myself, of getting used to it. I'm used to living in a domestic environment, with a family . . . all my life. Brought up . . . surrounded by family. So this is the first time I every pitched myself into this sort of thing. When I left my parents' home I got myself a small

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apartment in New York in the Village and I started housekeeping. Then I went out hunting for women. . . you know, someone to share my life with me. Now it's all settled. . . I'm not looking.

INTERVIEWER

Back to the *Notebooks*, again, you speak quite a bit about isolation. Do you feel more or less isolated now than at the beginning of your career as a poet?

IGNATOW

Much less isolated now. I know there are people out in the world who have read my work and who know what I'm doing.

INTERVIEWER

In the past you were isolated, culturally from your contemporaries. How do you account for this?

IGNATOW

The New Criticism was in ascendence in the '40s; also I was isolated from the proletarian school of the '30s, because it was so totally ideological. . . the Communist Party, the War Poets. I didn't go to war. Being married, I was deferred for quite some time. When the war was coming to a conclusion I was called up, but I had some kind of heart murmur. The Japanese attack, the Nazi horror, the Italian fiasco. . . none of this really affected me. I was so deeply involved with my personal domestic realtionships even in those years. Since I did feel myself to be a very private man, it explains why I have an antipathy toward the school of proletarian poetry in the '30s, and why, in turn, I had antipathy toward the whole school of New Criticism. The sort of poetry they were writing was metaphysical in the most tenuous sense; they were philosophically oriented and in their work they began with a principle or a hypothesis and then tried to create the poem from either one. Whereas, I was deriving my poetry directly from life experience. In that sense I was anticipating the

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poetry of the '60s and the '70s. So, I was isolated for a good many years, because I was such a *personal* guy. And it was only in the early '60s that poets began to flourish within themselves as the so-called "confessional poets." But I wasn't a confessional poet either.

INTERVIEWER

In a sense you were, but not in a pretentious sense.

IGNATOW

No, I wasn't flagellating myself or exposing my weaknesses just to show how weak a person I was as Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath were.

INTERVIEWER

Your situation is very unique. Is there another poet that is similar to you?

IGNATOW

Of my generation? No.

INTERVIEWER

Were poets like Meredith and William Jay Smith and Jarrell and Eberhart aware of your presence?

IGNATOW

Jarrell wrote a favorable, very short review of my work. He called me a street Sophocles or something like that because I would take the theme of Hamlet or the theme of Oedipus and put it in the language of the living room, the language of ordinary conversation. And to him that was remarkable. Otherwise, I was a total nonentity.

INTERVIEWER

You went your own way, you were your own man, your own poet.

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IGNATOW

Right. Really, I'd been formed much earlier in my life by the experiences in my parents' home. What I saw there left its mark upon me ever since. I saw how important it was to maintain personal initiative, to remain an individual. Because with my parents I was always in the precarious position of being submerged in their interests and subjected to their manipulations. And I had to fight it and discover myself. Discover myself through this conflict. I extricated myself from their demands on me. And that is the traumatic experience I think I brought into my poetry that was so different from everyone else. I found it very difficult to be accepted by magazines in those years. The styles were formed in schools, you see, and poems had to be recognizably from one of these.

INTERVIEWER

And the WPA was obviously one particular school.

IGNATOW

It was a school in itself. Strangely enough, I wrote very little about my WPA experiences. Almost nothing. I had some remarkable experiences on the WPA, and on Relief, and I never got to writing about it because I felt to do so would violate my individual integrity. I must have been terribly neurotic about it.

INTERVIEWER

There were instances—moments or topics—in the *Notebooks* where I wished you would have elaborated more, such as the passage where you say: "What is it about my life I don't like? It is the lack of more fame, the uses of one's self that come from it, the sense of belonging."

IGNATOW

What an awfully self-involved person that is!

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INTERVIEWER

Was it because you were not recognized or famous that you felt isolated?

IGNATOW

Well, in order to be famous, you have to write a poetry that's accepted by people whose opinions you respect. And in the early periods I was trying to do that. But after I had written the kind of poetry *I thought* deserved the respect and attention of people whose opinions *I* respected, I discovered to my dismay that I was writing a kind of poetry which really did not relate to the taste or interests of my generation in any way!

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in fame or in being famous?

IGNATOW

No, I just want to be useful. To me, fame means contributing. Giving the community something helpful.

INTERVIEWER

A nourishment.

IGNATOW

That's all, and being nourished back in return. Giving it love and getting love in return. To stand apart on some platform and people wave their little white handkerchiefs at you? That's horseshit. That's movie idolatry.

INTERVIEWER

In your opinion, who were the prominent poets of your generation?

IGNATOW

Lowell, Jarrell and Berryman. And I was divided from all of them because my experiences were not their experiences. My

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style and my lifestyle are altogether different from what theirs were. The war psychology those guys brought home was such a strong social bind on them; they couldn't get away from it. A guy like Jarrell made a deliberate effort after returning from the war to be personal in his world and it just wasn't convincing on that level. He couldn't get into the adult stage of his life. Berryman made a very slight attempt to reach out to me . . . we met at a party . . . a reception for, I think Edwin Honig and his wife. That was more or less at the beginning of Berryman's career. I think he had just completed *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* At the party he called me over and we talked briefly, less than one minute, and I just sort of clammed up. I wasn't interested. Because that poem didn't interest me. It was highly artificial to me, tremendously willed artifice, and I was turned off by it. That explains a lot of my isolation, you know. Generally, generations stick together and they take to each other and they help promote each other. I didn't experience that, though the others promoted each other a great deal. The generation that followed them began to take notice of me. The younger generation. The generation of Harvey Shapiro.

INTERVIEWER

Well, has your current fame altered your sense of vocation?

IGNATOW

No, I'm still struggling to be the guy I dreamt I was going to be when I was a child. That dream. I don't think I am anywhere near it, to be the exponent of the national sensibility, whatever that is. No, the vocation of writing poetry means remaining a private poet. When I write my political poetry it's as a private citizen. Fame hasn't changed much, except that I have a wider and heavier correspondence than I ever had before. And I may have to get an answering service. And the fact that I have helped edit an important magazine like the *American Poetry Review* is something I'm rather grateful for.

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INTERVIEWER

Why did Williams mean so much to you?

IGNATOW

Well, he was a poet of national reputation who came out in the New York *Times* with a review of my first book to call it a potential national best-seller, strangely enough. I felt I was confirmed as a poet. And from then on I could feed on that in a dry season, and fed on it for many years. It watered my desert, my loneliness, for a long time.

INTERVIEWER

In what way was he useful to you that was different from other poets?

IGNATOW

He was useful in his being present, on the scene—in this country as a *person*. Without him, American poetry was impoverished for me.

INTERVIEWER

But he was also getting a lot of negative feed-back . . .

IGNATOW

That's right. This is what astonished me, finally! when I began to recognize that he too was almost as isolated as I. Nevertheless, he was *somebody*. He was respected, endemic to American poetry. He represented the American grain. He made life important.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel that certain poets refused to acknowledge you as poet because of your allegiance to Williams?

IGNATOW

I think that happened. Oscar Williams tried to cultivate my friendship at one point. I was witness to a confrontation

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that he had with Williams one day and Oscar Williams was so nasty and insulting to William Carlos Williams. And Williams was sitting there very patiently smiling at this guy, not letting himself lose his temper. But Oscar was like a buzzing fly diving in on him. And I developed an intense dislike for Oscar Williams after that. That immediately disenfranchised me from the other poets he was publishing and left me out of his anthologies forever.

INTERVIEWER

So, you felt even more isolated for supporting Williams?

IGNATOW

I think there was an intensification of my isolation as a result of my allegiance to Williams, yes. Of course, it was happening anyway. I couldn't publish in *Poetry* or *Accent*. The stuff was automatically sent back. That was the school of New Criticism. I wanted to be part of the establishment. I thought the establishment could have some variety within itself. In the Whitman spirit. But, of course, I should have known better. Ransom was a gentleman and not a Whitmanite. A gentleman that preferred...

INTERVIEWER

Tea and biscuits. So, the critics had a headlock on the scene?

IGNATOW

Total censorship.

INTERVIEWER

How would you evaluate Lowell's influence?

IGNATOW

When Lowell came along, he—his style—completely cornered the market in magazines like *Partisan Review, The*

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Nation, The New Republic, The Atlantic Monthly and *Harper's*. Most of us were under the shadow of his fame. And those of us who couldn't conform to that kind of writing were shuttled off into the little out-of-the-way magazines.

INTERVIEWER

But he was a breath of fresh air. . .

IGNATOW

Oh, yes. His early work is exceptionally good. So he was a doubled-barrelled power, a genuine poet whose influence blanketed the entire northern sector.

INTERVIEWER

And he also helped to carry certain poets, like Delmore Schwartz. . .

IGNATOW

He nurtured them. But that's past now. Passed into the shadows. The whole school has just evaporated.

INTERVIEWER

How did Lowell's influence affect Williams' influence?

IGNATOW

At the time, Lowell's prominence in the northern sector was tremendously damaging to Williams' literary influence. Now, to Lowell's credit, he was able to see into the work of Williams. Lowell became a very good friend of his. And Williams learned to tolerate him and became quite affectionate. So, when Lowell published *Life Studies,* the influence of Williams was marked.

INTERVIEWER

Getting back to you. . . to what do you attribute your survival during this long, lonely, struggling period of isolation?

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IGNATOW

Well, I had a friend here and a friend there and my wife was very strongly in my favor, which was great. She worked with me closely on my poems.

INTERVIEWER

Is it possible for you to specify some of the things Williams enabled you to guard against?

IGNATOW

Against a romantic view of life. Against elevated language. Against trying to make a leap into something which didn't exist. He taught me to guard against being dogmatic, didactic, opinionated. . .He taught me to stay within the circumference of the experience. If you know your limitations and cultivate these limitations to their limits, that will extend you into the very next area which you may not be able to get into thoroughly, but at least you'll be anticipating something that goes beyond your limitations.

INTERVIEWER

In the *Notebooks,* you say that you met with resistance from your father about your poetry. . .

IGNATOW

Yes, very strong resistance. It was harrowing, to say the least. I began working for him about six months after I graduated from high school; I was about eighteen and a half, with no job and no prospect of a job. This was deep in the Depression, 1932 going on '33. Well, I had no choice. I tried staying home for a while and writing. I had the illusion that if I wrote the great short story, I would make my whole family rich. I was aiming at the *Saturday Evening Post,* and I wrote a story about a couple that meets on a trans-Atlantic liner, they fall in love and get married. She was rich. That whole number. He was a writer. Writing in big, romantic slashes. Well, it got turned down, of course. So, I realized that I

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wasn't going to make the family fortune as a writer. And that sort of collapsed my resistance toward my parents. They were trying to be very patient with me. They were in very desperate financial straits at that time. The old man was living on a quarter a day! You could have a bowl of soup for ten-cents, and you could have a roll and butter for a nickel, and I suppose the other ten-cents went for goodies of some kind. Well, when he came home he was desperately tired. And I could see his whole appearance changing under the circumstances; he became quite gaunt. But I absolutely had to be a writer. My old man had a little insight into these things. He came from Russia and loved Russian literature. He had books at home. But that was during his period as a worker. He was quite a man, quite an affable guy; very sociable and very loving. But somehow he was influenced by his brother, who was rather wealthy, to become an enterprising businessman and he changed. But when he was younger he told me stories by Dostoevsky and others which I found fascinating. He had such a great *love* for these writers that I said: "I must emulate them because I want that kind of love from my father!"

INTERVIEWER

In the long run, it was a reaction that worked against you?

IGNATOW

Right. He humored me for a while, for six months; but I had no skill at that kind of *Saturday Evening Post* crap. Well, bite the bullet: I had to go to work. *That's* when the real tension started between us. We fought like cat and dog. Many a time I thought I was going to kill him; many a time I thought he was going to kill me. It was awful. Very often I'd leave the shop when everyone else would be working overtime. I'd try to eat and rest and get my strength together to write. He'd come home at eight o'clock and say, "Where is that bastard?! Where's that son-of-a-bitch!?" It really broke my heart . . . because I *knew* how much he loved me.

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INTERVIEWER

What did your job consist of?

IGNATOW

The business was a pamphlet bindery. Machine work. Or I had to push carts through the streets downtown, just above Canal Street. That's how I became acquainted with the Village: loading the pushcarts and hauling them over to the printer. I was in the business on and off. I'd run away. I tried to join the Army; the Army turned me down. Then one day I said, "I'm finished, I'm never coming back again." And I had exactly ten-cents in my pocket. So, I took the train to Borough Hall in Brooklyn; I had heard that boys would gather around the fountain there and form groups. Then they'd go out through the country, looking for jobs or taking freight trains. Anything to get away...So I decided I was going to do that. I could see they were a tough bunch of bastards: very hardened, cruel, cynical guys. They'd been through much worse than I had. They had no good clothes on. And I was fairly well-dressed. They scared me. "Christ, if I get in with these guys, I'm going to be really finished! Where's my career as a writer?" I had spent five-cents for fare and I'd spent five cents for peanuts. I had no money. So I walked over the Brooklyn Bridge back to the shop. I walked in. The old man turned around and saw me. There was a big grin on his face. He went to the telephone, called my mother and said, "He's here. Your little boy is here." So that fixed me for about a year. I ground it out from eight in the morning until five, five-thirty, working and trying to write at night. It was awful. But I wrote.

INTERVIEWER

What characteristics have you inherited from your parents?

IGNATOW

My mother's stubborn pride and my father's highly mer-

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curial temperament. Within a half an hour he could show you seven different sides of himself: very excited, or very warm, or very angry, or very jovial. He had a creative temperament. My mother had a staunch capacity to stick with something . . . stay with it and endure it. I have that very much, too. She was very stoic, a very strong woman. The post in the house . . . you know, the anchor. She kept the whole thing together. From her I learned how to handle domestic problems, money and emotions. I always remind myself of her steadfast plodding manner in the house to compose myself under stress in my own domestic relationships.

INTERVIEWER

How did you finally get out of that job?

IGNATOW

I think it was in 1932 or '33. I'd published a short story that was named on the honor list in the *Best Short Stories of the Year* anthology. And out of the blue I got this letter! The WPA was looking for writers to fill its Writers Project. A godsend!

INTERVIEWER

Could you settle down and work any place in the States other than New York?

IGNATOW

I don't think so. I've turned down teaching jobs in Berkeley, Michigan, Kansas . . . I would not have kept my voice there as a poet.

INTERVIEWER

You're quoted as saying that the writing of a poem is a celebration to you, "... the experience of one's everyday life that readers can relate to." Have you found a joy in despair? How can a poem of pain also be a poem of celebration?

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IGNATOW

Well, there's no suffering without life, there's no life without suffering. Put on the coat of life, and it has two sides to it: it has suffering and joy. It all depends what the weather is. If the weather is joyful, you turn the coat on to the joyful side; if it's full of suffering, you turn it to the suffering side.

INTERVIEWER

When did you begin to recognize this element of celebration in your poetry?

IGNATOW

If there was a turning point, it was when my son's breakdown happened. I was ready to give up. But what was I going to give up? I mean, I've seen the worst already, what worse could there be? He needed me to at least survive his own ordeal, and I had to stay well. And I had to stay well for my wife's sake, too. You can't go on despairing...it'll drown you.

INTERVIEWER

There was one very vivid passage in the *Notebooks* where you run into your son on the street carrying your diaries...

IGNATOW

My notebooks.

INTERVIEWER

...to oblivion.

IGNATOW

And I didn't stop him. Amazing. I didn't stop him, because I felt so sick, so sick of everything already...He dumped them in the Hudson River. I just shrugged...And I said, "Oh, he's got the notebooks on him..." He even said to me, "I've got your notebooks in here." He threw away a couple of years of notebooks. I just shrugged and went

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upstairs. He went and dumped them into the Hudson River.

INTERVIEWER

What's he like, your son?

IGNATOW

In a rather crippled way, he's a survivor. It's interesting. I tend to agree with Laing that the emotionally disturbed child is simply not bound to the culture and would like to free himself of the culture, and this is the only means he has with which to express his independence. We immediately term these people insane, but they're not... They have created a different order of existence for themselves, which doesn't have a base in reality. They can't organize a society around themselves; they don't have the means with which to do it. They're powerless, absolutely powerless. They have to be put in a special category, a special place. My son continues to have hallucinations... different people, voices. But he's very practical-minded. He knows that he's getting enough money on Supplemental Security Income to cover his expenses; whereas, if he were to go out for a job, he couldn't make any more than that. And he might be in danger of rebelling again and once more become really incapable of handling a job. So, he thought all this out; he decided that this is it, this is what he has to do; he has to stay where he is until he can really recover himself, and integrate with society the way he sees me integrating. I can understand it. I'm quite sure that if he were to drop from SSI and be forced to take a job he'd crack up again. Because, to him, society in that sense is worthless, doesn't mean a thing.

INTERVIEWER

How old is he now?

IGNATOW

In his thirties.

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INTERVIEWER

Has the relationship now improved between you and your son?

IGNATOW

Well, I spent thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars on him at one period. I broke myself. He'd come out, go to a psychiatrist. He came out three times. And back three times. So I had no more money. There was nothing left I could do for him. I was trying to be very close to him during that period, but I couldn't penetrate. Couldn't get beyond his hallucinatory states. Or, when he would have that more or less under control with the aid of a doctor and some medicine, he would be quite a tense young man. It would be very hard to take him into my confidence, or he to take me into his confidence. He was just too tense and he'd be very hard in the house. The whole atmosphere of the house would be so charged with his emotion . . . which couldn't be articulated. He was already twenty-three when my daughter was to be born, and he became violent and we had to get him out of the house again. So that was the extent of our relationship. And today he'll drop up to see me occasionally, but there isn't much that we can say to each other. He's lost contact with his old friends and just maintains relationships with the guys around him who are also from the hospital. They talk about baseball, they ride around in a car occasionally, go see this, go see that, and they talk about their meals . . . but it's very low level stuff. No intellectual content in his life at all. He avoids it like the plague. So we sit there and we have nothing to say to each other. He has no interest in my work. I don't know, I could talk to him about baseball all the time. Baseball or good food. That's the relationship.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about money?

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IGNATOW

Well, I'm not a Buddha in the sense of I can sit under a tree for a thousand years. Who can? The climate doesn't allow for it, anyway. So we need money. We need money for houses and for comforts. To relax.

INTERVIEWER

Are you an impulsive writer, or do you set aside a certain number of hours to write?

IGNATOW

I've alternated between being impulsive and scheduled. When I was living out in East Hampton, during the three grants that I was lucky to get, I organized myself on a morning schedule, and, whether I had anything to say or not, I would sit down at the typewriter and slip in a piece of paper there, and I would tell myself there was nothing to write until something finally emerged, and I'd just keep at it for three or four hours. Those were the years when I didn't have to teach; I didn't have any other schedule to keep except my writing schedule, and so a lot of work got produced. Now, trying to keep a schedule these days while teaching . . . it's impossible! I write when I can.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work from drafts?

IGNATOW

Sure. I get the first idea down as fast as possible. Sometimes, it's largely, successfully realized, with just a few little things needed here and there. But I'd say just as often, I have to fool around with it afterwards. Often I want it to grow cold on me so I can go back and become the critic of it. And then, seeing it cold, I see what really emerges and what doesn't, and I can almost instantly supply the needed lines or stanza. In this way I may have three or four poems going at one time.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you write a poem straight to its end, or do you write a poem in sections and then proceed to fit the sections together?

IGNATOW

Well, the shorter poems I complete. I can go to forty or fifty lines, and then come back to it and see what I could use. But there were poems like those in "The Ritual" which were written in steps and stages. Each one had to be written over a period of several weeks; had to rethink it over and over again. I'll often take a lot of short poems, which might have been written over a period of four or five years, and put them in a sequence. I come back to my subjects, come back to my themes over and over again, and look at them differently as time goes by. There's always a new emphasis.

INTERVIEWER

Do your working habits vary with the nature of the poem?

IGNATOW

Oh, yes. Sometimes I can take it quite casually, where I could knock off, say, ten or twelve lines, and just let it rest for a while. At other times, I feel I must go on. I often get an impulse. If I get started on a poem, I feel I must go to the very end of it. And I exhaust myself. Say, if it's a thirty or forty line poem I just have to do it! Nothing can stand in the way; but then, often enough, I find that I've gone too far.

INTERVIEWER

How long does it generally take you to finish a poem?

IGNATOW

Anywhere from ten minutes to ten hours.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when a poem's finished; how do you know when to stop writing?

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IGNATOW

If I feel I'm no longer getting an image, or a metaphor, of what has to be said, or if I feel that the cadences are petering out, or that I'm beginning to editorialize, then I know I've got to stop. If I'm beginning to comment on the poem itself I just drop it. At other times I feel that I may be writing tongue-in-cheek...

INTERVIEWER

Does the writing of a poem present answers for you, or merely more questions?

IGNATOW

I think answers, a good many answers. My poems don't raise any questions; all they do is state the facts, or state the situation as is, and I take that as the reality, the solution itself. But, of course, I may go back in time to write about a subject, but it'll be from another angle...totally different because the situation is changed for me, as for example, a new context has developed around the whole issue of death, and that for me creates a whole new need for new insights. Poetry, for me, is insight.

INTERVIEWER

Do you make notes for future use?

IGNATOW

I have done it in the past, but I don't need to make notes anymore. A poem emerges from a whole stock of mental impressions I've had from long ago.

INTERVIEWER

Are you very self-critical, or critical of others?

IGNATOW

I'm both. I think I'm critical of myself as a poet. But it remains for the critics to tell me if I'm critical enough. I'm

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always willing to listen. I think I've done a pretty good job of keeping myself in line as a poet.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that your work makes relationships with people more difficult?

IGNATOW

It depends. With poets, I don't have any problem. But with the average person, for example...here in this apartment house, I'm unable to reach out and invite them to my apartment for coffee and talk; I can't do that. That is the result of being a poet and writing poetry. They, I can see, are people who might be accountants or bookkeepers or garage mechanics or chauffeurs or workers in dress shops. I'll be in the elevator with them. I'll say sometimes, "How are you? Nice day. How's the weather?" and I can see they're anxious to say more, they want to say more. But they don't know how. And I don't encourage it. How could you explain to them what it means to be a poet?! How could you really open up to these people? How could you tell them the most important thought you've had for the day on the subject of emotion, imagination, love or life itself? They'll tell you things. They may want to tell you that they also have a deep emotional life, but they don't have the tools with which to express themselves. They can listen to you. But, they become alienated from you because they're unable to meet you in verbal terms. And so you find yourself talking to impassive faces. And this isn't to say that they don't have those feelings. They do! But they are amazed and possibly resent your articulate abilities; you're opening up areas that they have decided they can't ever reach because it's too difficult. Maybe they even think it's too dangerous to get into that area. It might interrupt their lives. It might affect their work. It might affect their marriages. But here you are articulating. That creates a problem for them, and this is where poetry closes you off from people.

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INTERVIEWER

And that separates you. Poetry is the most powerful of the arts and because of this it has the power to make people feel stupid.

IGNATOW

That's the great tragedy.

INTERVIEWER

When you write a poem do things occur to you that were not at all in your mind when you first started the poem?

IGNATOW

Oh, yes! That's the great joy of writing a poem. Coming to a whole mine of unexplored stuff, and you just *dive* into it without a helmet and you just hope you survive all that richness that you find. It's a marvelous feeling, digging out a few shovelfuls of that stuff. That's what I look for in a poem, a new adventure, a new depth.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever described a situation of which you have no personal experience other than a belief in the poem itself?

IGNATOW

Oh yes. All three ritual poems I've never actually experienced. It's an art to make a poem as convincing as reality.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever go through periods where you don't work at all? When you find you can't write?

IGNATOW

That's happened. I've stopped writing because I haven't been able to resolve my personal life, where I couldn't face certain events in my life and didn't want to write about them falsely.

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INTERVIEWER

What do you do then?

IGNATOW

I keep in touch with people by correspondence. I do a lot of editing. I make phone calls. I worry about money. I see people. I go to the theater. I keep in touch with friends. I keep busy. I wash the floors. I do my laundry. Work on school work. . .

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever written about not being able to write?

IGNATOW

That's what I'm doing in my journals.

INTERVIEWER

How real to you are your poems after the poems are finished?

IGNATOW

Oddly enough, it takes quite a few years to recognize their reality. For example, the poems I wrote in the '50s, when I was writing them, they weren't the reality; the reality was the living itself. At the time I thought that this was just filling in a couple of hours with release. . .relief from torture, or relief from life. But now I see they *are* the life.

INTERVIEWER

Can you think of any one of your poems in your experience that in its reading has led you to a mood of despair?

IGNATOW

Yes, some of the poems about my son. I sometimes break down when I read them.

INTERVIEWER

Which poem are you most proud of?

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IGNATOW

"Rescue the Dead"

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a stance in either confronting your own poetry as you write it or looking at somebody else's?

IGNATOW

For myself, I try to take the most truthful position toward the poem in relation to the experience. In relation to other poets, I *try* to remain as catholic in my view as I can. I really will work very hard, where the poem is difficult, to become involved with it and see it from the inside.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a sense of limitation?

IGNATOW

But definitely. I don't think I could live without a sense of limitation. Sometimes you feel that you're unlimited, but it's very scary. When you're writing a poem that's very exciting. It's so intense you think you're leaving yourself. That's important to experience. In fact it's invaluable. Then you know how close you get to death. What's limitless is death; life is limited. And it's good to get back to life...after you've written a poem.

INTERVIEWER

I sometimes get the impression that you find writing poems a burden. That you become restless, that this sense of restlessness can be felt in the poem.

IGNATOW

Sometimes writing a poem *is* a burden. It doesn't always answer the problems. When you aren't particularly interested in writing, but you have no other choice but to write. That's happened often. It's like being imprisoned, and you have no

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choice but to do what's limited to the life of the prison. And the writing is hard to do. Very hard.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any poems of a kind that you haven't written before that you visualize yourself writing?

IGNATOW

Sure! I'd like to write great poetic drama! A tremendous epic! I'd like to write great epics. I'd like to write the last poem of the world.

INTERVIEWER

That's an interesting concept!

IGNATOW

I tried that in one little poem. Shall I read it to you? This poem has no title to it, and I thought of it as the last poem of the world.

I am dreaming of the funeral of the world
watching it go by carried in an urn
reduced to ashes
and followed by a horde of mourners a million abreast
across the broadest land
and all chanting together: We are dead, we have killed
ourselves. We are beyond rescue. What you see is
not us but your thoughts of us.
And I, who am observing in terror of it being true
hope not to have to wake up
so as to let myself discount it as a dream.

INTERVIEWER

It works on two levels as once: it works on the level of the waking world and on the level of the sleeping world.

IGNATOW

Well, I hope it's not the last poem in the world.

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INTERVIEWER

Cocteau said, "Know what you can do well and don't do it." Would you say that the kind of poem you write or perhaps the prose poem is something you do well, and, with this in mind, have you ever considered changing to another kind of writing?

IGNATOW

I have...I have to do something that I can't define for myself now. Maybe it's a return to the direct, very personal lyric. I've been writing a lot of love poems. They are very personal, very direct and open...explicit. I'm more comfortable with that right now. The emotion dominates the poem rather than the concept.

INTERVIEWER

Your sensibilities have changed?

IGNATOW

I'm wandering...I'm going in circles.

INTERVIEWER

You are read so widely now, among poets and students alike, and studied, in fact, on many campuses, that one rarely meets anybody interested in contemporary American poetry who doesn't at least know your name. In fact, you've eclipsed a great many poets you had to deal with back in the forties. How do you account for this?

IGNATOW

Well, I guess my style anticipated the style and sensibility that today is prevalent among the young and maybe among college teachers. I started out with a sense of doom and frustration...my personal sense of tragedy has become the metaphor for the sense of tragedy we feel nationally.

INTERVIEWER

Do you account for becoming generally known among a

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younger generation of poets because they did not try to write like the generation to which you properly belong by age... the generation of, say, Lowell, Berryman, Schwartz?

IGNATOW

Seeing it from the point of view of the students, well, then, the answer would be *yes*. They wouldn't want to write like Lowell or Berryman. Neither of them took their lives seriously enough or saw their lives in its tragic context. There's a sense of distaste in Lowell's work, a kind of disdain for his life...a weariness with it. And Berryman has a kind of contempt, too. For himself.

INTERVIEWER

They're kind of snobby.

IGNATOW

They found themselves in this menial society. They of superior craft, of superior mentality and education and social status, had to deal with these problems of everyday living, which, according to their education and background, should have been of very little consequence to them. They couldn't escape it. So they have a contempt for their material. I had a struggle with my demons, and I took them very seriously and that was the difference.

INTERVIEWER

What is the recurring metaphor of *walking* that you employ in your work? What does it mean to you?

IGNATOW

Well, *walking* to me is *thinking*...going from one object to another, a way of working things out.

INTERVIEWER

What do dreams mean to you and how do you apply them to your writing? I'm thinking of such poems as "The Errand

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Boy'' or the poem entitled ''The Dream,'' which is in *Say Pardon.*

IGNATOW

They're flashes of insight that penetrate the banalities and clichés of everyday life. I know that something is going on beneath the surface that's really the life we're living, *not* that surface cliché. So I discovered a good mode of expression is through bizarre arrangements of images we call dreams.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write the dream out as it actually happened, sequence by sequence?

IGNATOW

I invent the dream.

INTERVIEWER

Do you record dreams?

IGNATOW

Actually I don't. Virtually every poem in the book *Facing the Tree*...every dream poem is an invented dream. But these are metaphors for states of mind which are below the surface of my everyday conversation. I invent them in order to have access to the insights below the surface. This is how I state these insights. I can't find any other way...I have to imagine.

INTERVIEWER

What is important to you?

IGNATOW

The most important thing is peace of mind....growing out of an assurance about one's relationships with others. Relationships that you can count on that won't backfire...on which you can turn your back and not fear some sort of a

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reprisal or betrayal. It's a dependence thing. You have a relationship which becomes a metaphor for your relationship with the rest of the world. And if it's a secure and loving relationship on which you can count for your needs, physical, mental and emotional to be filled, then you have what most people lack. You have going for yourself a balanced energizing situation. Then you can turn around and put your energy into a lot of different things because you can take this other thing for granted. A person loves you. You know that this love will not fail you under virtually any circumstance. This love is for you and you alone. Something for you which is for no one else. That's important. When you have that I think you have a treasure.

INTERVIEWER

What are you working on at the moment aside from the love poems?

IGNATOW

Well, I'm thinking about how everything is related to everything else. It's a world of oneness, really, which has been hidden from us by the world of specialization into which we are plunged. The world of technocracy makes too prominent and too important such utilities as the refrigerator, or the car, and a special kind of a car, to separate it from all other cars. You can say this all comes from the earth. Everything is from the earth. We're from the earth. We're all intimately involved with one another and with each other. We're intimately related. You can only distinguish yourself by maybe your name, because you might find a mirror image of yourself in some other person and it would amaze you, but it happens. I'm not saying that that mirror image would be writing the same kind of poetry you write. That's not it. But you see responses that are strikingly similar to yours in situations. It raises a lot of questions. The body is attracted to other bodies. All bodies are attracted to one another, really. What then is love? We all love one another. Beneath the sur-

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face of race, conflict, social conflict, money conflict, nation conflict, we're all very much alike and we could love one another, at least in the abstract. We know this. . . we've seen it happen. An American soldier falls in love with a Vietnamese girl because bodies are all informed with the same need to have other bodies. So when we see all is one then why do we take one for all? Interesting question. Why do we take one for all? Well, could it be that we will it so? Is this a cultural phenomenon? These are questions I ask myself. If all is one why do we choose one for all? I ask myself *is this necessary?* You know this whole concept of romanticizing a relationship. The whole concept of love. Not every society believes in it. They really encourage it in this society and it causes terrible trouble. An awful mess. And I'm the worst offender of all. The Chinese are perfectly realistic. They marry their children to one another before the child is even aware. They recognize that the whole idea of love is an illusion, because it's love for everyone. You have to love everyone. Anyone and everyone.

INTERVIEWER

If you had to describe how you're feeling now in your life and work in a few words, how would you do it?

IGNATOW

Well, I'm drifting, ecstatic at times, sad at times. . . drifting, I seem to be caught in some kind of rapids and I don't know where it's taking me. I'm terribly excited about it, because I willed it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see yourself in some way being or becoming a major influence on American poetry? Have poets come around to your way of thinking?

IGNATOW

I think most poets have caught up with me now. So I think what I really am is in a kind of a tradition. . . carrying out a

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tradition, rather than hacking out a new wilderness. From that point of view, it's rather unfortunate if I find poets copying me in any way. I feel that they're falling behind.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of Allen Ginsberg?

IGNATOW

Ginsberg's influence was tremendously overpowering for a while. I think he is suffering from a decline of his influence . . . if it's of any importance to him. His influence no longer shows itself. By that I mean, the poets who felt him strongly aren't around to give his work that kind of an ambience, that radiance, that intensity it once had. Instead, they've taken his surface changes, his surface appearances. His best work remains very powerful. But, believe it or not—believe this or not!—the young poets I'm in touch with now think that he's almost totally irrelevant for the '70s. They can see that "Kaddish" is a nice poem, a moving poem, but it doesn't affect them. "Howl" doesn't even apply to them. They're not in that kind of a groove. That applies to my work, too. I don't feel myself any longer unaccepted, left out, exiled. And that does something. Except with certain critics, like Harold Bloom, or poets and critics like Richard Howard who have pretensions to the genteel tradition on a plane of abstraction within Transcendentalism, or A. R. Ammons elected to carry on this tradition within Transcendentalism. If that became the dominant sensibility in this country again I would have a fight on my hands again. My own sensibility would once more become radicalized in confrontation with genteelism. But that has become peripheral to contemporary poetry. Writers like Harold Bloom and Richard Howard are peripheral to American poetry. But they never were at the center either, except Ammons who still could be, but, apparently under the influence of Harold Bloom, he has spread himself very thin. I'm one of a group which is at the center, the living center of contemporary poetry today. And that

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doesn't make me stand out any longer as a major influence. There isn't any poet standing head and shoulders above others today, in that sense. Maybe we're all trying to find a way to emerge from the web in which we are living. Where is the new frontier? For me, it only can be very personal. Whether it has a significance eventually in poetry, I couldn't estimate at this time. But I know that I personally am confronting new frontiers, and it's scaring the shit out of me. It's like being in space. It's tremendously exhilarating, too. I'm going to have to make certain sacrifices. But that's all personal. That's of no significance at the moment in poetry.

INTERVIEWER

You've stated in the *Boundary2* interview that "more than ever I'm convinced that political poetry is here to stay." What is your own sense of the poet as political writer?

IGNATOW

Politics, to me, means *how to run a government.* Since we have a social structure that needs someone to govern it there are values involved. To me political poetry is not a matter of getting on a platform . . . And yet the technique by which we can avoid writing a kind of political poem that sounds like agit prop *is* to do it through the person. The poet should do it through his own sensibility and not through a whole series of ideological statements . . . which to me is ridiculous. I saw that sort of thing being done by the Communist Party in the '30s and I rejected it immediately. Not only was it impersonal, but it was dehumanizing . . . the sort of thing they were asking poets to do. So I decided I had to give up that method, but I couldn't give up the principle of arguing the *large* issues. The large issues of life and death as related to the conduct of a state, how to conduct a social system. The individual poet must respond to political issues from his own experiences and from reading and from a general sense of what is right and wrong. It can never be ideological.

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INTERVIEWER

In light of what we've been discussing in regard to poetry and criticism, Robert Bly stated in one of his columns in *American Poetry Review* that "we can let the academic imagination regain control over American Poetry that it had during the time of the New Critics or we can fight." Do you think that this *regaining of control* Bly talks about now that Williams and Olson are dead, their sphere of influence on younger poets is no longer a threat to academically oriented poets and critics, that one way that we can overcome their regaining control is to follow Lincoln's example of the warrior energy by forcing the issue to band together, to fight them in print where it hurts? I remember reading somewhere Lincoln says, "To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men."

IGNATOW

I think that would be a somewhat perverse statement made by Bly, perhaps meant to be ironical. It doesn't sound like Bly, you know. But I think Bly was simply stating the alternatives, otherwise it sounds like what the Communists used to say at the time before Hitler came into power, *We got to let Hitler come into power so we can have something to fight for.* It's idiotic because the catastrophe was enormous. No, I hardly believe Bly meant that. No. In fact, I think that our view of the influence of Williams and Olson as declining today is not quite correct. The influence is still very great... still remains at its crest, as far as I can see from the poems I'm getting for *APR* and other places. The use of the free form remaining paramount among all poets that I know of, established poets and learning poets. So, I don't see what the issue is here.

INTERVIEWER

Has a new kind of academic arisen lately?

IGNATOW

Yes. Men like Bloom, for example, and John Hollander

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who writes in free form, but whose poetic sensibility is overly refined and recherché. You don't get the harsh impact that Williams searched for and which Olson also presented. What I mean when I say harsh impact, is the kind of life both of them had to live which was the only kind of life they had. They had no choices, you see. Neither of them was an academic and neither thought of making his living in college or by writing in such a way as to appeal to a genteel audience. That wasn't what interested them. They had their backs to the genteel tradition and their faces toward the life they were participating in. But what's happened is that the powerful influence of men like Williams and Olson has gone very deeply into the writings of the genteel tradition, so that the academics have had to absorb their techniques and with these techniques are once more reasserting a kind of quietism, an intellectualism that both Williams and Olson would have totally rejected.

INTERVIEWER

Because it wasn't enough . . .

IGNATOW

It's not rounded enough.

INTERVIEWER

Or not enough of a commitment.

IGNATOW

That's right. I'm thinking of John Ashbery, for example, though he reaches passages of acute evocatory insights.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still sense a critical resistance to your work? And where is it coming from?

IGNATOW

I think it comes from the genteel tradition. They certainly sense that I'm opposed to contemplative poetry in the sense

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of withdrawal from life. I'm very pleased that there *are* a number of critics who side with me and work towards making my poems better known. But there is still a very strong resistance from men like Bloom and Hollander and Richard Howard. They have a strong resistance because I threaten their basic assumption about poetry, which is that language takes precedence over content. They think through language you learn of life. I say you learn of life through sensibility which then has to be translated into language. Their tradition is a bastard romanticism. If you look carefully at the romantic tradition you'll see that it began with sensibility. Resistance to the intellectualization of poetry in the 18th century. Wordsworth resisting it by personalizing his poetry with the language he was born into and raised with. So the fight is still there. It's a kind of see-saw fight. Right now I would say that the prestigious prizes on the whole are going to those favored by the genteel tradition.

INTERVIEWER

Did you find yourself, after Williams's death, suddenly alone again?

IGNATOW

No, I didn't. I have some marvelous friendships among poets: Jim Wright, Robert Bly, Stanley Kunitz, William Meredith, Harvey Shapiro, Armand Schwerner, Jerome Mazzaro, Ralph J. Mills, Jr. They've been very good to me.

INTERVIEWER

But at the time of Williams's death did you go through the struggle or lack of optimism of some kind of support?

IGNATOW

Well, I felt that it meant the beginning of the kind of regression we've been talking about: the reassertion of the genteel tradition. It had more or less gone into the background. His influence had gained enormously just before his death. The young were flocking to him, learning from him in every

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way. Well, with his death I felt we had lost a powerful, exciting force in the midst of the enemy, the elite.

INTERVIEWER

It's as if he had handed you the torch.

IGNATOW

That was the feeling I had. Not only me, but he gave it to a few of us.

INTERVIEWER

But I think the others were well on their way already. Olson already had his school of poetry behind him . . . was plunging on.

IGNATOW

Well, I still felt myself alone in the sense that I didn't actually have followers, not that I wanted any; but, you know, it inevitably happens when a poet publishes a large body of work he draws the attention of other poets who are beginners who will tend to model themselves on his work. And I find that makes me very uncomfortable. Your own work returns to you through the psyche of another poet and he or she is not doing it quite the way you would want it to be done. And it's not right. I get poems dedicated to me from poets and some of them really send me up the wall. With the years I came to realize that I had a lot of friends all the while and they stepped forward or I reached out to them, too.

INTERVIEWER

I like what you just said about reaching out to them because you bring across a certain kind of generosity from a part of your personality that comes across in your work as well as in other areas.

IGNATOW

I always seem to find where the water is coming from.

—Gerard Malanga

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The Bath Of Madame Mauriac

André Pieyre de Mandiargues

I know a woman who takes mouse baths. It is true that they are white mice, that she is a singer, and that she only does so before going off to sing Thaïs.

While servitors are hastening supper for the opera-goers under the potted palms of neighboring eating-places, Sibylle Mauriac heaves her ample body from the chaise lounge on which it has been reposing all day. The sound of a gong surrounds her with orphan girls, nine in all, whom she has chosen specifically for their beautiful eyes, their general air of ill health, and the delicacy of their hands. A tinkle of laughter resounds, despite the thickness of the curtains, when Mauriac announces that all should be placed in readiness for her bath.

It is the duty of each orphan girl to remove one piece, always the same, from the costume of Sibylle Mauriac, and to place it in the wardrobe. The girls have the care of nine such wardrobes, which, along with the chaise lounge, some tapes-

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tries and a great many mirrors, make up the entire furnishing of the room.

Mauriac, naked, must then be conveyed to the room set aside for her bath, for she is anxious not to tire herself needlessly on days when she is to sing. This is done by means of a chariot covered in angora wool, or more exactly, of red-colored monkey skin, its fur trailing down upon the blonde carpet; here Mauriac reposes in a hollow concavity adapted to the contours of her body, gorging herself on pistachio fondants while the orphan girls hum *"Couronne-toi de roses..."*, or other fragments of that opera of which their mistress is the principal attraction, all the while pushing against the wheels or the strapping of the little harnesses attached to the cart.

Between the sea-green walls of her pentagonal bathroom, under a parchment ceiling, translucent with the lamps that it conceals, the bath-tub is a lilac-colored enamel basin resting on tiles of black ceramic, embellished with periwinkles and yellow asters. A long bronze pipe, decorated in the Corinthian style and terminating in a leopard's head with gaping mouth, flattened ears, and prominent whiskers, leads off to the mouse-pens that are distributed between three maids' rooms and provided with grooved runways, slanted so that, from below, to pull the cord hanging at the side of the tub sends a whole flood of little white animals down the pipe.

Mauriac has numerous friends who have access to her bathroom. Sometimes there is a crowd of courtesans, pressed back into the five corners of the room to allow the orphan girls to move around the tub. Mauriac is extremely obese, with very clear skin, so spotlessly maintained that there is not a single hair from the hairline of her flowing tresses to the tips of her toes, except for her eyelids, her eyebrows, and one small tuft, which she rather fancies, just below her left breast. The mice fall in a warm rain, scampering everywhere over her body, lashing her with their tails and pricking her with their little claws; then, tired of stirring, when they are waves of billowing fur at Mauriac's sides, her beautiful hand nonchalantly

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opens the hole of the drainpipe; then she will pull a cord to induce an additional downpour of fur.

Mauriac's doctor, a diminutive Chinaman from Batignolles, assures her that, in the ancient East, baths of mice, dormice and rats were commonly used to stimulate the circulation of the blood among the great sedentary beauties of those days. Whether these benefits are real or imagined, it remains true that when the singer leaps forth, her skin flushed rose as if from the glacial pummelings of alpine waterfalls, her throat is crystalline, and from that moment until the moment that she appears on stage, a *fata morgana,* troubling the senses of the holy hermit from behind a heaven of tulle, the overwhelming frenzy of her voice and gestures is a mighty flood without stint.

Even the most passionate music-lovers, familiar with *Thais,* come away so transported by Mauriac's trills that they find it impossible to believe that such a perfect nightingale could have taken wing, in effect, from that Auvergnat throat.

Translated by Albert Herzing

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John Wynne

Two Struggling Actresses

Jayne Mansfield isn't dead.
I know.
She isn't living, maybe, but she isn't dead.
She didn't die in that car crash
Just her dog and her tits and her dress
But that doesn't mean death
No.

Hollywood stretches
For miles over a parched valley
And the Santa Monica hills
Slope down to the beautiful blue sea
And there's the Pacific Coast Highway crowded with cars
And the people who live
On the beach at Malibu have
Splendid views at night of the Palos Verdes Peninsula
Thousands of lights twinkling for their pleasure
They call it the "Queen's Necklace"
And some nights I was invited down for a bar-b-que
And if the air was clear
I could see the circle of lights
And would stifle a laugh as I picked the sand between my
toes
A necklace indeed, fit for Jayne
Or any other Queen slumming it through Hollywood.

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You know,
I used to live next door to Jayne
Of course, it was before she was a big star
We lived in an apartment
North of Hollywood and Vine
A ramshackle old place.
My room was right next to hers. . .
I know because
In the day, I'd sneak inside
Open her closets
And there'd be her dresses bright reds and pinks
At night, I knew she was home
Because she'd stick her head out the window and I could see
Her mass of curly blonde hair
She'd look like some masthead of a ship
In Columbus' day
Bound for a bright new world
Or covered with foam and turned around
Heading back past the Azores
Failing that night.
Then she'd kneel back into her room
And I'd hear her pick up a glass
And put it to the wall and listen for me
But the only thing she could ever hear
Would be me listening for her.

Then she'd put the glass down and, I suppose, go back to sleep.

You know,
I used to put a rose in front of her door
Every morning
A bright red rose
She'd come in and find it.
It was brighter than the brightest lipstick she'd slash
Her mouth with
She probably thought

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Some dirty creep who lived upstairs
And spied on her as she climbed to her room every night
gave it to her
But she took it in every day
She took the rose
And would take the one the next day
And never say anything about it.

Jayne was a whore, then, trying
To make it big.
Every man in Hollywood lusted after her, but
She rarely noticed, never recognized me.

One night I heard her pick up the phone
And put a call through to her mother
She said,
"Oh, Mother, I'm doing fine—
Producers are getting me this job
A producer's getting me that, don't worry.
It's all working out so beautifully.
And, Mother, I want you to come out and live with me soon
I'll have a job
I'll have enough money
And, honey, I want to buy you something—a necklace
But, Mother,
I remember you have either—wrinkles
Or a kind of scar on one side of your neck
I don't know which, I don't know which side."
There was a pause.
I didn't hear anything.
Then she said,
"Oh, Mother, come on, don't be that way! I know
You have some scar on your neck. Now which SIDE is it
ON?"
Then there was silence again
Then Jayne broke into laughter,
"All right, Mother,

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If you won't admit to it, I'll go out
And pick you the prettiest necklace I can find,
For Heaven's sake!''
Then I heard the phone slam down and her laughter
and then
It rang again quickly and she picked it up
She said,
''Look, Mister, I don't know who the fuck you are
I've been fucked to death all night
And I can't stand it another time
So fuck off, fucker!''
And she slammed the phone down
Then it rang back just as quickly
She picked it up and dropped it
The phone hit the floor with a clang and slammed against
The table leg
I could hear it swinging in the air
It meant she'd taken the phone off the hook
And suddenly I realized it was morning
And I had to get up and dress,
Leave a rose by her door,
Walk down the stairs,
Go outside,
Wait for a bus and go to work.

Jayne and I were really doing the same thing in those days
Getting fucked by any man we could
It made her a star
It made me. . . .I don't know what
But you know,
I'm living and she's not living
She's NOT dead—I won't admit to that
But I suppose she's not living. . .
You know why?
Every morning I drive by her big pink house
On Sunset Boulevard

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And I put a rose down lightly outside the gate
And no one ever picks it up
Sometimes
Two or three days go by and four bright fresh beautiful
Roses, not even wilted,
Are lying there by the gate
And they stay there until some streetcleaner comes and sweeps them
Away
Or some lady driving from Brentwood back to Beverly Hills
Sees them and stops and gathers them up, puts them in her car
And drives off.

That's how it's been.
It's funny, funny how things turn out
I'm still living there
In that same apartment
I have a man, you know, who looks just like
Jayne's Mickey
Like a big super-god with a big super-dick
He knocks on my door every night and says,
"Jayne. . .Jayne, let me in. . .I wanna see you, baby."
So I open the door and he looks at my face
My face that's so pretty
Because
I've taken hours and hours and hours
In front of a mirror
To paint it white
And to put the reddest lipstick on that I could find.
Flame red.
So thick.
And he says,
"Honey, you look good. Unzip my zipper and get what you're after."

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So I'd reach hungrily
For his zipper and pull out his cock and put my mouth
Down on top of it
"Ohh. . . Jayne. . . Smear that dick with your lipstick
Oh, honey, turn me on. . . "
Then he'd put his hands, his strong hands on my dress
And ooohhh, he'd pull it up pull it up above
my waist
He'd never feel my cock
Just turn me over, over on the bed and stick it in
And fuck me
I'd cry out in pain
I'd hold onto the bed with all my might
The awful power of him hurting me so
One night I screamed
"MICKEY!MICKEY!STOP!"
And there was banging at the door and he said—
"It's O.K. She's O.K.
She just. . . . went out of her mind for a minute."
And then he went back to fucking me
And the person at the door drifted away.

And then he'd leave—my Mickey
And I'd lie there in bed
Covered with sweat
My yellow satin dress pushed up above my thighs
My face imprinted forever on a flowered pillow
And I thought
Where am I?
Where am I going?
To the stars?
Into space?
Past little red planets whirling mysteriously
To where the black holes wait for me
They call to me,
"Jayne. . . " they say,
"Jayne. . . we're waiting. . . fly to us. . . fly to us. . .

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Disappear with us into infinite—''
And then
I get a call
The phone rings sharp
It's my mother
''Oh, Mother,'' I said,
''This call, it's so late. Is anything wrong?''
''No,'' she said. ''How are you, Paul?''
''I'm. . . I'm fine.''
But I was writhing
Writhing on the hot bed. . . and thinking of
Eternity and red roses and red lipstick and black holes
I said,
''Oh, Mother. . . Mother darling,
I have an audition
It's. . . it's for a part they're doing on T.V.
I. . . I want you to see that. . .
It's narrowed down to two of us. . . It. . . It's the role
Of. . . . the. . . . son. . . . ah, I don't remember his name
It's a T.V. show of *Desire Under the Elms*
Oh, Mother, you *must* come out and see me
I know I'll be quite good. . . and. . . and successful and—''
''Yeah,'' she said. ''Calm down.
Do you know how much it costs for a bus trip all the way
From the Midwest to where you live?? Quit dreaming, Paul,
Quit dreaming.''

And I said,
''I'm not dreaming.
I'm awake.
And, Mother, I want you to come 'cause I bought you a
present.
The loveliest, most beautiful necklace that I could find
On the boulevard this afternoon. . . . And, Mother,
I put my whole life's blood into picking it out.''

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Louis Simpson

Sway

"Swing and sway with Sammy Kaye"

Everyone at Lake Kearney had a nickname:
there was a Bumstead, a Tonto, a Tex,
and, from the slogan of a popular orchestra,
two sisters, Swing and Sway.

Swing jitterbugged, hopping around
on the dance floor, working up a sweat.
Sway was beautiful. My heart went out to her
when she lifted her heavy rack of dishes
and passed through the swinging door.

She was engaged, to an enlisted man
who was stationed at Fort Dix.
He came once or twice on weekends
to see her. I tried talking to him,
but he didn't answer. . . out of stupidity
or dislike, I could not tell which.
In real life he was a furniture salesman.
This was the hero on whom she had chosen
to bestow her affections.

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I told her of my ambition:
to write novels conveying the excitement
of life . . . the main building lit up
like a liner on Saturday night;
the sound of the band . . . clarinet,
saxophone, snare drum, piano.
He who would know your heart (America)
must seek it in your songs.

And the contents of your purse . . .
among Kleenex, aspirin,
chewing gum wrappers, combs, et cetera.

"Don't stop," she said, "I'm listening
Here it is!" flourishing her lighter.

*

In the afternoon when the dishes were washed
and tables wiped, we rowed out on the lake.
I read aloud . . . *The Duino Elegies,*
while she reclined, one shapely knee up,
trailing a hand in the water.

She had chestnut-colored hair.
Her eyes were changing like the surface
with ripples and shadows of clouds.

"Beauty," I read to her, "is nothing
but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear."

*

She came from Jersey, the industrial waste land
behind which Manhattan suddenly rises.
I could visualize the street where she lived,
and see her muffled against the cold,

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in galoshes, trudging to school.
Running about in tennis shoes
all through the summer. . .
I could hear the porch swing squeak
and see into the parlor.
It was divided by a curtain or screen. . .

"That's it," she said, "all but the screen.
There isn't any."

When she or her sister had a boy friend
their mother used to stay in the parlor,
pretending to sew, and keeping an eye on them
like Fate.

At night she would lie awake
looking at the sky, spangled over.
Her thoughts were as deep and wide as the sky.
As time went by she had a feeling
of missing out. . . that everything
was happening somewhere else.

Some of the kids she grew up with
went crazy. . . like a car turning over and over.
One of her friends had been beaten
by the police. Some vital fluid
seemed to have gone out of him.
His arms and legs shook. Busted springs.

*

She said, "When you're a famous novelist
will you write about me?"

I promised. . . and tried to keep my promise.
Recently, looking for a toolbox,
I came upon some typewritten pages,

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all about her. There she is
in a canoe. . . a gust of wind
rustling the leaves along the shore.
Playing tennis, running up and down the baseline.
Down by the boathouse, listening to the orchestra
playing "Sleepy Lagoon."

Then the trouble begins. I can never think of anything
to make the characters do.
We are still sitting in the moonlight
while she finishes her cigarette.
Two people go by, talking in low voices.
A car door slams. Driving off. . .

"I suppose we ought to go,"
I say.

And she says, "Not yet."

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Peter Klappert

Matthew's Other Love Song

Paris, 1940, just before the exodus and the Nazi occupation

In that high thin sun, in that provincial winter,
surely Madeleine
—et vous, Madame, mère bien-aimée
bienfaisante bienheureuse bienséante bienveillante
et, bien entendu, très entendue, bien fortunée—
surely
you will miss the fire left in Paris, the low
clandestine light in Paris-buttoned-down-to-war.
À l'heure de couvre feu, surely,
you will think back to the Chartreuse glow, the sallow
Chartreuse dance in the Aver jet
and the blue grisaille of the blackout down the curb
—to the votive stars drifting above the rooves
and the few dark chimney sparks, the siftings
from a shuttered window, minute amperage
where a paneled door has come unseamed.

Terrapin that you are, Maurice, and mock
magician in the night, surely you will regret
the flaring match struck off in a pissotière,
the black erectness of the Eiffel Tower,
the reddening pipe-smoker's bowl, the brief hot
singe at the tip of a Gitanne.

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In that nutrient air
—Henri—
where sun itself seems all sufficient manna,
will you not mourn
Paris in her soiled petticoats, chafing blood
back down to her legs by a bundle of twigs, chewing
two worn-out heels of garlic sausage,
patting a smudgeon of rouge to sunken cheeks
and getting back up on her feet and down
through the unlit door and up to the corner:
the bistro closed and the streetlight black.

In your summer hammock
—Dustbin!—
among the better crowd of refugees, won't you feel
again the blush on wind-burned cheeks and hear
the small stentorian newsboys, the trumpets
in their voices lean and flat, see
the hovering breath in kiosks, hobo heat
in dark containers motoring past, nebulae
rising off a chestnut vender's fire
outside the chill chapel

—Ignace?—the mute cold
in the tin poor-box, the first jellied
light through stained glass, the air
standing silent on marble tables in a moment when
Gaston here
sends up his corrugated curtain in a jabbering barrage
(and what were you doing there!)

—surely, surely,
as you lie browning in a pad of butter,
as pulled across your scalp the hairs
seem blonder and more thin—

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"—Is there yet small verdure
on the market tables?"

"—Immortelles
in Père-Lachaise?"
"—Are there bayonets,
black pins, parading on the bridges? A black gear
grinding above the Senate?"
"Offizieren at the Closerie?"

In the aurora borealis of exhastion

"—Is there a dome of fever under the famished skull?"

"Is there life, up there, on Earth, in Paris?"

"Ah, the deep
maroon in Norman apples
idling in a cellar"

"The liquid
smart in a thimble of Calvados"

"The moist throb in a thrush under the eaves"

—and in pockets, empty pockets, nesting hands.

When the mistral sends all awnings flapping
and an impatient sea rolls over—jade, cobalt suddenly
gone obsidian under the chop—just there,
just then you'll hear the pre-dawn milk-train
counting cobbles up the boulevard Saint-Michel,
see all hours of the world unwinding
round the *New York Herald's* clocks, and sense
grey bats, the risen ghosts of church mice,
skimming among the unsounding, violet towers.

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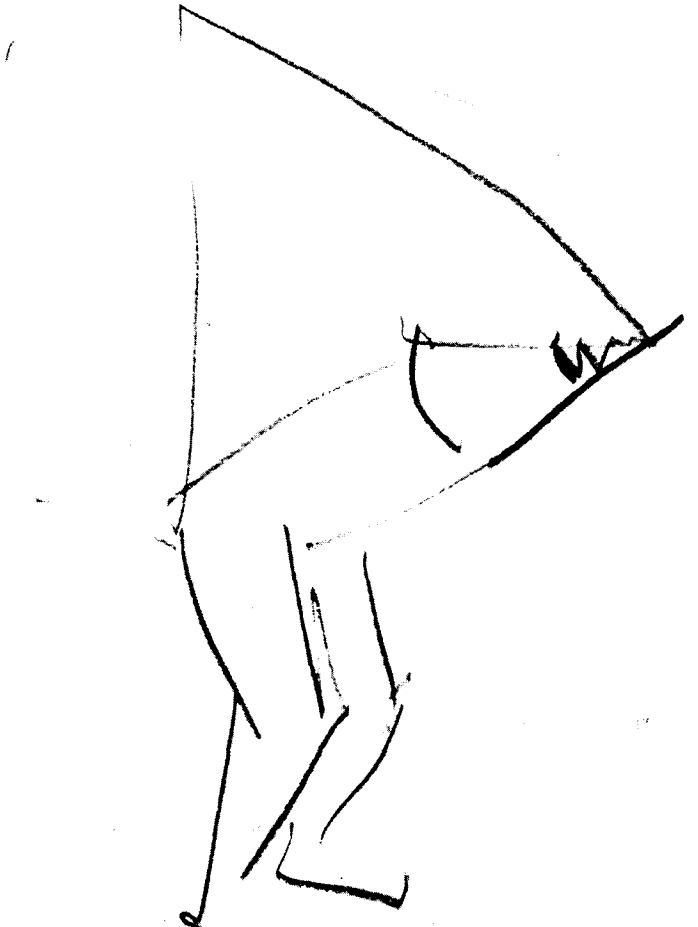
Portfolio

Pencil Drawings

Michael Hurson



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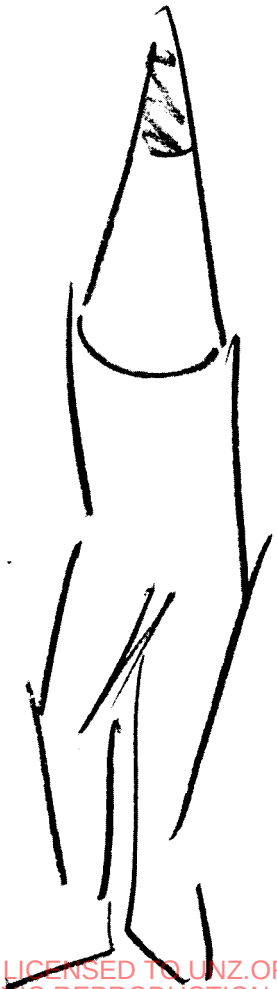

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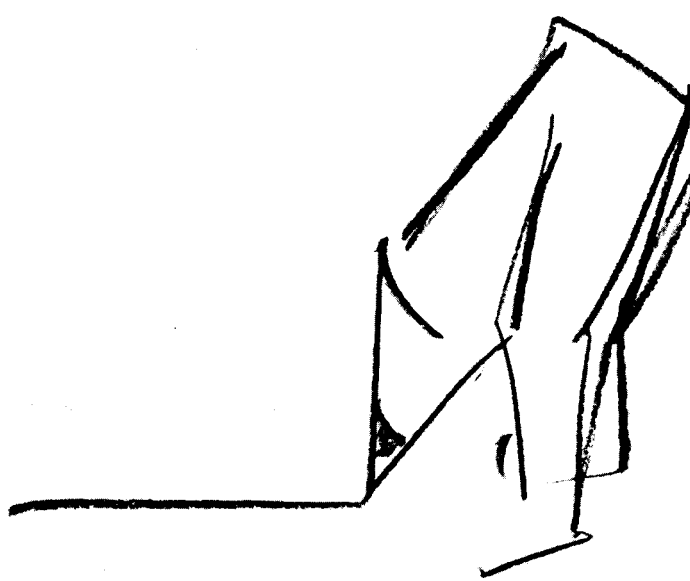

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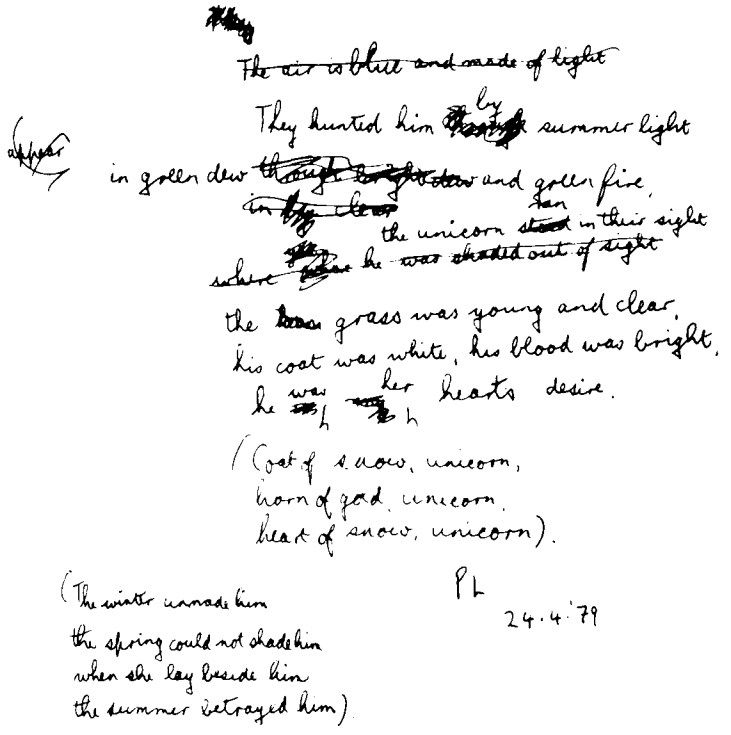
April 24th '79

New verse for the unicorn poem (song for Mary O'Hara).

4.


The air is blue and made of light
They hunted him by summer light
in golden dew and golden fire,
the unicorn in their sight
the grass was young and clear,
his coat was white, his blood was bright,
her hearts desire.
(Coat of snow, unicorn,
horn of gold, unicorn,
heart of snow, unicorn).
PL
24.4.'79
(The winter wanted him
the spring could not shade him
when she lay beside him
the summer betrayed him)

A Peter Levi manuscript page.

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Mrs. Peter Levi

Peter Levi

The Art of Poetry XIV

Besides having a wide reputation in England as a poet, scholar, and Oxford don, Peter Levi is also a translator of Russian and Greek writing. He has traveled extensively through Greece and Afghanistan. His travels through Greece, which began in 1963, led to an extended companionship with such writers as George Pavlopoulos, Katsimbalis, and George Seferis; with Seferis he was politically involved in Athens during the "reign of the Colonels" in the late 1960's. The trek through Afghanistan resulted in one of Mr. Levi's few works of prose, The Lightgarden of the Angel King, *published in 1973. His most recent publication is a thriller,* The Head In the Soup, *about Greece under the Colonels.*

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This interview took place during one afternoon in the spring of 1976, just after Mr. Levi had left the Jesuit Order to get married. We were in his rooms at Pembroke College, where he tutored during the interim between religious and secular teaching positions at Oxford. Though it was a sunny day in spring, the chill of the English damp was everywhere, and no place more than the stone colleges of Oxford. We sat in overstuffed armchairs in front of a gas fire, cheered on by an occasional glass of scotch which the host was kind enough to provide.

Levi is a tall, lumbering, handsome man, with sometimes an intimidating manner. But his eyes betray him—they are full of kindness, much given to laughter; they suggest a genuine love of life and the subject matter that it has been his life to pursue—the Classics, literature in general, and most especially the reading and writing of poetry. His poetry reflects his classical background; it has a restrained, almost a distilled quality, and is conscious of the whole range of classical as well as modern structures of rhythm and meter. Among his works are The Gravel Ponds, Ruined Abbeys, Pancakes for the Queen of Babylon, *and* Death Is a Pulpit.

INTERVIEWER

Having recently left the priesthood, perhaps you'd care to talk about how religion and being a priest have affected your writing?

LEVI

Well, I suppose that anything that affects one as a human being affects one's writing. I do believe in Christianity.

INTERVIEWER

When did you become a clergyman?

LEVI

When I was seventeen. I was in religious training most of my life. I did a lot of things when I was a clergyman which

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most people don't have the opportunity to do. For instance, to start with, I'm half-Jewish and also I'm a Roman Catholic. Therefore I'm very much on the edge of ordinary English society, of any kind and of any level of that society. But clergymen can move between classes and be accepted, always with a difference, by whatever class they are talking to. So that I've had access to more parts of English society than most people do. Had I left the school I was at, and done the job I would have done, I suppose I should have been stuck in some kind of class model or other. I would have dressed in a certain way, spoken in a certain way, ate and drunk and had holidays and married in a certain way and had children of a certain kind. And that's quite different from the life I have led. Then again in the Roman Catholic Church clergymen are bachelors—this may make them hellishly idle—and it does mean they spend an awful lot of time in pursuits which married people on the whole don't have time for. Then again people in endless, almost perpetual training to become priests are encouraged to take seriously all weighty matters. They were so perhaps more in my day than they are now. But that's because the training in my day was more meaningless, and more endless than it is now. Now it's all purposive. Frightful nonsense. In my day it was rather purposeless and went on and on and on. One had a lovely time.

INTERVIEWER

Wasn't the Jesuit training rather rigorous—hair shirts and spiked bracelets?

LEVI

I haven't ever worn a hair shirt, but I wouldn't think it a particularly rigorous thing to have to do, would you? I've been far more uncomfortable, I think, than a hair shirt could make one. If anyone feels that their life is so easy that they need to go and inflict themselves with gratuitous fantasies, well...

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INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about the sermon as a creative medium?

LEVI

Oh I think it's very interesting. Donne's sermons are wonderful. An opportunity not open to most human beings of having a captive audience. I think it is much unexploited and I think it has thrilling potentialities, but of course only if you happen to believe what you're saying. And it so happens that I did. I mildly regret not being able to preach any more sermons.

INTERVIEWER

You're a classics scholar. Has your poetry been influenced by your knowledge of Greek and Latin?

LEVI

Well, I suppose it must have been because I read a lot of Greek and Latin. I suppose one must be influenced by any profound admiration. My admiration of Homer is immense and yet, I can't imagine that I've been influenced by him very much. Then I admire Aeschylus, I admire Aristophanes, —but everyone does, I think. I don't think there's anything so odd about being a classical scholar. It's just that most people aren't classical scholars because they don't know Greek and Latin, poor things. And if they did, they would just think like I do about it. Horace is I suppose, of all writers, my most constant admiration. I admired Horace enormously when I was a schoolboy. I still do, and there's been no intervening year in which I haven't admired and read Horace.

INTERVIEWER

What is it specifically about Horace that you admire?

LEVI

Well, he's autobiographic, in a very restrained way. His rhythmic mastery is almost unparalleled even in Latin—that

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dense and apparently casual language. There's an awful lot of reality in his poems. More, as it were, of the grit and gravel of reality to the square foot than there is in most writers. I wish I could be like him. I even like his meters. I like him in quite simple ways. I like the noise he makes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that the knowledge of languages is important to a writer?

LEVI

I think it was Belloc who said that there are only two ways of becoming happy. Either you stay in the same place, or you go right around the world and come back to the same place in old age. Well, I think it's like that with languages for writers. A man might be perfectly suited by knowing nothing but English—really knowing English. I don't know what really knowing English is like. Who knows English? The person who knows the most words, the person who can do the Times crossword puzzle? No. You end up having to use words like "genuine" and "authentic." No use, are they? On the other hand, if you're not going to stick to one language, if you're going to know a little bit about other cultures, it might be better to be John Clare or to live on a mountain or never to move out of one village. If you can't do that, then knowledge may not be better than innocence of knowledge, but it's certainly better than false opinion. So then, I think people ought to learn languages. As to how many, I should have thought that depended on leisure, talent, individuality...

INTERVIEWER

When did you begin learning languages?

LEVI

Oh I don't know—whenever one does begin learning them in English public schools. Whether we started with French of Latin I can't remember. But it was a perfectly ordinary English prep school system.

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INTERVIEWER

Could you say something about what that consists of?

LEVI

You had classes and you got beaten if you hadn't done the right work. And they had charts on the wall which said LA VACHE, LE FERMIER, LA BICYCLETTE, L'AVION, and that sort of thing. It was great fun really. I don't think you began to read real French books until you were about twelve or thirteen. Latin books. . . there was a terrible writer named Eutropius, who I never encountered since. I had to read him in school.

But the point about our schools was that you were left in a library a lot. And there was a big library and you could read what you liked. I even learned Greek. I changed schools because they didn't teach Greek very well, and I got annoyed. I wanted to learn Greek because at that time, I was about fourteen, and I'd conceived a great enthusiasm for a work by Oscar Wilde called *De Profundis.* I thought, as generations of English schoolboys thought and I daresay still do, that Oscar Wilde was very sophisticated. Not an opinion I hold now but I did then. In the course of *De Profundis,* Wilde says that the most beautiful and greatest work of art is the gospel in Greek. I decided that this must be true, because I liked the gospel even in English, and even in the foul version which we had to read, and I wanted to learn Greek.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that what you have just described is a conventional background for coming to Oxford?

LEVI

Yes. Used to be. Probably still is. The problem about Oxford is the problem of the whole country. It is a class problem. At one time it seemed that there were too few grammar school boys here. In my day it was a case of the public school boys going out of their way to be nice to the rather

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few grammar school boys; now nobody needs to be kind to them. But it is very difficult to try to keep up an academic standard which is very high and, I suppose, to some extent based on the notion of a leisured class, while at the same time trying to break down the class barrier in this country, which everyone wants to do.

INTERVIEWER

How would you say teaching affects the life of a writer?

LEVI

Well it might earn him a living, that's one thing it might do. And if teaching isn't creative, then what is? Plainly any job which gives you enough leisure to do what you want to do is all for the good. I don't think it's a particularly bad thing for a writer to study literature, though he ought also to do other things. It depends what time of life you're at. You could say at least this: that every writer, except some very eccentric ones, ought to pass through a stage sometime in his life of serious study of literature. The point of teaching is the opportunity to think new things, find out new things, to have a library. Obviously every way of life has advantages and disadvantages for a writer, and they will alter at different times of his life. But the particular advantages of working within a university are that you have enough books, that you have some leisure, and that you continually find new things, either by teaching or by your ordinary research. What works to the disadvantage of the dons here at Oxford is over-work and not enough money.

INTERVIEWER

I understand that you were an undergraduate when Maurice Bowra was teaching here. Before we move off Oxford, do you care to talk about any influence which Bowra might have had on you?

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LEVI

Maurice didn't have an enormous influence on me but he had an enlivening influence on everyone he knew. He was an enlivening, generous and, as they say, life enhancing person. He was brisk, he would stand no nonsense. He was extremely funny, and he would give you a lot of champagne. All good characteristics. Also he was a scholar and a gentleman, old-fashioned words which one can't use of everybody. It's good that somebody is that. But you see, in the days of my youth, the last products of a much older society, perhaps I mean really a late Victorian society, were still teaching at Oxford. Even if they themselves had been at school in the 1900's or perhaps even in the 1910's. If I think of Roger Mynors, John Beazley, and Maurice Bowra, all three somehow strayed out of a background which I imagine to be solid, in a way that no one's background is solid anymore, that I know. All Maurice's ancestors were magistrates in China, I think. Roger Mynors was a sort of average Etonian. You could find out what he was like as a little boy by reading Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*. John Beazley, I think, was not an aristocrat, but he was certainly a gentleman. They were all persons of much more generous temperament, more willing to unbutton, more amusing, sharper, in some ways more assured in their prejudices, their world view, than most dons are nowadays. And since their departure from the university (though Roger Mynors is fortunately still alive and, we hope, still writing about Virgil), the university's become a duller place. That's expected, isn't it? One would expect that to happen. Whether the undergraduates have become duller quicker than the dons, whether the dullness of the undergraduates has made the dons duller, or vice versa, would be a pretty point to decide.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any particular dealings with Bowra?

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LEVI

No, I don't think so. We had a lot of interests in common, but I hardly knew him as an undergraduate. I met him once —he gave a party for Robert Frost. One of my own contemporaries, Julian Mitchell, a rather unacknowledged good writer, was an undergraduate at Wadham—which is Maurice's college. And Maurice said to him, "Dear boy, you must get me the poets, I want five or six of them, undergraduate poets, to meet Frost. I'm giving a party." Well, this was a very grand invitation for an undergraduate. I think it's probably true to say that it was the only time I ever crossed the threshhold of a head of house when I was an undergraduate. Maurice objected to my being asked and he said to Julian, "I won't have a Jesuit in my house. Who is he?" And Julian said, "Well you've got to have him because he's written these poems in my magazine which are quite good." I'd published about four poems in a magazine called *Gemini* that Julian was co-editor of. Of course I didn't know about this conversation until much later. When I arrived, the door opened, and there suddenly was Maurice Bowra. Intimidating figure. And he said, "Ah Father Levi, Father Levi, I've read your works, I've read your works." He said only about two other things to me in the course of that whole evening, but I was transfixed by him and became an admirer for life —because he was so funny and formidable. Little tubby formidable man he was. I made friends with him much later. I went to see him when I was going to come back to teach here, and asked him what I should do, or who I should be, or... and he said well what was I interested in? And I, trying to be concise, said, "Oh, I think literature rather than history, Greek rather than Latin, poetry rather than prose, but I have got a passion for Greek vase painting." And he patted his tummy and said, "Pots and poetry, pots and poetry, like me, no way to pay and promotion." And he was right. He wasn't a particular influence on me, but was on the whole university. He changed the tone of a generation.

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INTERVIEWER

Could you say something about what has had an important influence on you as a writer?

LEVI

I don't know *why* people become writers but I can tell you *how* I became a writer. When I was about nine or ten at boarding school I was imprisoned in a room called the "Round Room," shaped rather like the top of an old-fashioned key. There one had to do one's homework for what seemed an interminable period—actually it was about an hour and a half. You weren't allowed to read novels or comics during this period, you could only read school books. But I discovered that if you'd done your exercise quickly you couldn't be prevented from reading poetry, because poetry was thought to be work. Therefore if you were reading poetry they couldn't reprimand you. So I then found poems of Sir Walter Scott. I suppose I read the whole of his poetry in those hours. They seemed to me jolly jingles, and easy to imitate. No doubt I underestimate it, I haven't re-read it. And then one day it was raining and there was nothing else to do and so I wrote a poem in what, at that age, I conceived to be the style of Walter Scott. Since then I have never stopped writing. It's a natural activity, you see, writing. More people do it than will admit to it, and the difference between people who regard themselves as professional writers and other writers is much more shady than we suppose.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any other influences on your writing which you would care to mention?

LEVI

Yes. One of the things was that I was ill at the age of sixteen with infantile paralysis. This gave me great leisure at an important time for me. Then also the enforced boredom of boarding school played its role. Then I joined the Jesuits and

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I did a course of studies which was really an enforced idleness of many years. I could do absolutely what I wanted providing I didn't make a nuisance of myself. That was very important. I find that I know trees, how they behave, how they look, how they smell, what it's like to look after trees seriously. Very few people who are going to be what in England are called literary intellectuals ever have these opportunities. At the time it was like being confined, but in fact it was a great opportunity. There was nothing to look at but the weather and the trees, squirrels, and the orchids, flowers. . . and that's what I did. Then, when I was at Oxford, I got run over by a motor car. That meant that I had about two years off work. That was very important because very few people who come to Oxford have much leisure, because they all have to work so hard. But I didn't because I had these headaches from being hit on the head by this motor car. At that time I moved from doing Greats (Classics) to doing Byzantine and Modern Greek. But because I had headaches the whole time, I could only manage a little work, and only did what I liked. So I spent the whole lovely time reading the things which interest me most—seventeenth century Romance epics, and George Seferis, and a lot of medieval things that I like. Therefore I've had more leisure, by freak chances, than most people have. And I ought perhaps to say also that when I was an undergraduate it didn't occur to me that I could possibly become a poet in the sense of publishing a book. And indeed I thought of confining myself to writing in Latin verse, because even though no one would read it I thought no one would read it if I wrote English anyway. Writing Latin was both fun, and I thought would make one a better Latin scholar. And then somebody said, "Oh no, you musn't do that, you've got to write in English. We've all got to talk about reality and that." So, all right, I said. I thought that when I came back to Oxford to be a don I might dry up. But I didn't particularly dry up. Real life didn't stop. Another disease saved me there. I have chronic catarrh and I can't stand the English winter. That's why I went to Greece so often; when I would

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get ill I'd go down there. And because I was there, real life took over. But having all these illnesses was absolutely vital.

INTERVIEWER

You referred before to writing as a "natural activity." What do you mean?

LEVI

Oh, I quote John Berger in a novel called, *A Painter of Our Time.* "Singing is simply a natural sign of human habitation, like smoke." I think poetry is like that. Indeed I could make a case that all art is like that, and people would not know that something was art if they hadn't been told so. When the earliest of homines sapientes made their laurel leaf-shaped flint blades, nobody told them that it was or wasn't a work of art. So now we don't know whether to call it a work of art or an artifact, whatever that means. The fact is no one had told them. I think the same thing applies to poetry. Nobody told Homer that poetry was art. Perhaps they had, perhaps he had learnt it. Indeed I think there's evidence in Homer that he had learnt it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think this "art consciousness" causes a dilemma for artists of our time?

LEVI

Oh lord, yes. I think it's fearful nonsense.

INTERVIEWER

How do you think this has affected contemporary writing?

LEVI

Well, most people are writing for a diminishing audience, aren't they? And because they know that most of what they think of as their natural audience are actually watching the television or reading the newspaper, when they should be

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reading works of these great men, they get dogged about it. And they write deliberately and, I think, rather aggressively, very obscure and clever works which can only be read and understood by persons exactly like themselves, of whom there are, possibly fortunately, fewer and fewer. It's a social thing, it's part of the development of our society. When you have somebody who becomes a popular success as a writer, other writers will immediately go for his throat. They're very envious of one another. And they're envious of anybody who's an artist and not a writer. They'll never admit that anything more modern than what they happen to be doing is an art at all, unless they're sensible. There used to be a time when they didn't like jazz, and now, they just like the cinema, I think. Most poets of my age, or even ten years above, understand and like the cinema. Rather few understand that television is an art form. They're terrified by the whole notion of television. Therefore they won't accept that it can be an art form. And yet if what they want is this great audience, why don't they go and get it? There it is, waiting for them. They could, I mean, be doing something useful that people actually want them to do. I don't think that any writer could call himself serious if he's never considered working in films and television.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about the writing of free verse?

LEVI

Free verse is all right, but you'd better know what you're doing before you indulge. I dare say that there are a lot of writers who don't. I say, "I dare say," because I don't actually know that there are a lot of writers who don't, but sometimes one sees poems that one doesn't like, and one thinks that the chap is simply incoherent, he doesn't know his own silly business. But one may be wrong, one may have got it wrong oneself, may not have been sensitive enough to a particular noise. Sometimes it's the third time that you see a

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poem when you suddenly say, "Oh, that's what he's doing. How interesting." And if you can remember where his other poems are, then you can go back to them. I think that with something like a collection of poems you can always tell, but not on one poem.

INTERVIEWER

But as far as whether a writer decides to write in free or formal verse. . . ?

LEVI

Everyone must find their own way, take their own road, and see to the end of that road before they abandon it. Everyone must inevitably start from where they happen to be. Wherever they were brought up, whoever their parents were, whatever language they talk with, whatever accent. . . they must start from there. And we know from countless examples, from what we later call literature, that anyone can be a great writer. All I say is that you have to see what you're doing, sooner or later. You have to understand the consequences of your choices, and the fact that they are choices—the fact that they are choices being a fact which is gratuitous.

INTERVIEWER

What about the way in which you chose to write "Pancakes for the Queen of Babylon?" William Cookson said of it that it was written in a very surrealist style.

LEVI

Oh yes, people are always saying that. Maybe it is. I do think, about surrealism, that the English never went through it. And that, in some way, it was a lack. That it was something that one has to cough up and get it over with or sweat out—a kind of infection. Somehow any person that didn't have the infection, didn't cough it up, remains lacking in some way. I think that that accounts for some of the apparent dullness of a great deal of modern English poetry. Because,

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let's face it, a lot of it is very dull, isn't it? I know that a lot of Americans get infuriated with it. I see why, though I don't think they're right. I think it has got other values which are worth noticing. The resonance, the plain decent ordinariness, and in the end the nobility of temperament of Larkin's poetry, seems to me to be a profound contribution to our language. But we are speaking of. . .what were we speaking of?

INTERVIEWER

Surrealism and "Pancakes."

LEVI

Oh, "Pancakes." Surrealism. Well, I don't think there are many good Surrealist poets. The only English supposed surrealist is David Gasgoyne. I'm not a surrealist, never have been. But perhaps now I may tell you something which will answer your first question about how being involved with the clergy has affected my writing. When I was studying, first becoming a clergyman, my ordination got put off for general bad and riotous behavior, for a year. That must have been in 1963. In that year they let me go for a holiday in Greece, a great concession at that time. I'd always wanted to go. And so I went for the first time. I was mad on meeting the local poets. And I didn't realise what a great man I was to encounter, and what a strength and power of poetry. One of the writers I wanted to meet was somebody called Nikos Gatsos, of whom I had by heart one line, which translated would be:

> A little grain for the festival, a little wine for memory,
> a little water for the dust.

I thought that a very good line, and the notion of this line had been playing in my head. I met him when I went there. I also met George Seferis, who is one of the two great poets I have met in my life. The two greatest human beings and the two greatest poets I have ever met are George Seferis and David Jones. Both dead now. I wish that I could claim that

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either of them had been an influence on me, but I don't think they have. Men moving in their lives, wonderful and free in their performance in poetry, strong, rooted like trees. But I'm straying from this blasted book of mine which you have asked me about.

I was living in the country, in North Oxfordshire at a Jesuit training center, very near where I've finally settled now. I found that all my poems had a certain sameness. I connected this with the fact that they were mostly written at about five in the evening, after cutting brambles in the woods or something, for most of the afternoon—when I was quite tired, when it seemed always to be sunset and I'd had a hellish day usually, hellish morning anyway of mad lectures on non-subjects. And so these poems were rather sad, nostalgic, gloomy sort of poems. And I felt that what I was expressing was merely that it was five o'clock in the afternoon. The subject matter had simply evaporated. Having decided this I thought well I'll write just one more of those poems, and it will be the poem of that kind to end all poems of that kind. And I did. I wrote that poem and I thought well I'm not going to write anything for three months; I made a deliberate design not to write anything. I wanted to break the rut that I'd got in, and have a long re-think. Which somehow I connected with going to see Gatsos, whom I admired so much. This line is so unlike anything that I could ever write, about a bit of grain for the festival—such a good line and something I could never begin to write like. Well, I did meet him, and on the last night that I was in Athens on the way home, he and I and an American friend, a novelist named Charles Haldeman, had dinner together. I remember that it was windy, a wind called the Maltempi was blowing, and we dined out of doors, rather high up, on a flight of steps, in the Plaka. Plaka then wasn't as it is now, it was quieter, nicer. Somewhere you could actually go to. Towards the end of the evening, Nikos suddenly said, "You know, I remember when we were young, and Surrealism was all the rage, Elytis and I, (Elytis is another Greek poet), there was a game we used to play. Shall we play it?"

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The game was a version of the ordinary old fashioned English party game called Consequences. You write something on a piece of paper and turn it down and pass it on and the next person writes something, turns it down and passes it on, and so on. For this game, it's question, answer, and comment. If the three who are playing this game are closely in harmony, or working well together, or their subconsciousnesses are aligned, or—don't know what it is—you get the most extraordinary questions and answers and comments. I can remember much later playing it with somebody and getting out of it; "What is Mr. Heath doing now" (it was the time of a general election), "She is confined to a tapestry monastery," "The goldfish are very pink in the pools." You see what I mean? By studying that game I had what I thought was a break through about the way in which context works in poetry. As with a painter, if he puts a color on canvas it changes colors on the other side of the canvas, so for a writer, if one sets out a context, a word can have a most important resonance and appear powerful, even great poetry, which in another context would have been ordinary. Shakespeare does it a lot, for example. After a long description of a storm with heavens swallowing the sea, the sea surging upon heaven, ships sinking, all hell broken loose, he suddenly says, "Does the wet ship boy sleep in such a time?" And that ship boy is very very wet. It's all context—poetry is the control of context. Well, I thought that the way in which these questions, answers and comments in this game worked together by context, was a sort of insight into the way in which poetry really works. So I thought that I would write a poem in which I left out everything but the way in which poetry actually works. By power of context, by the associative power of context. Other things are built into it. In the course of the first part of "Pancakes" I've actually quoted several pieces from the game as we played it. The second part ends with something which John Holloway once said to me. About the decadence of the means of modern poets, and how our whole effort ought to be to say something perfectly simple, like, "A white ship riding on black water," and

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make it seem the most wonderful thing one had ever heard said. Set up a context in which that worked. And I think that the end of the second part of that poem actually is that phrase. But in fact I asked John Holloway about it again later, and I think it comes from Tolstoy, from one of his letters.

INTERVIEWER

That's one of the lines of the poem which really sticks in one's memory.

LEVI

Well, I hope it wouldn't if I hadn't put a whole poem around it—at least, that was the point. It's repeated and reversed I think. Yes. It goes:

We woke to find
A white boat rocking on black water
a black wind rocking on white water
a white boat rocking on black water

Yes. Half remembered from Chaucer:

Out of these black waves for to sail, Oh wind, Oh wind,
the weather ginneth clear.

INTERVIEWER

What made you choose the title "Pancakes for the Queen of Babylon?"

LEVI

Oh, that's a joke. Partly because Nikos liked the title. And it was dedicated to him. It's a tribute to a poem called "Amorgos," Nikos' one long poem. This poem is simply a tribute and a grovel in front of "Amorgos" which I think is a very very great poem. He's a great and beautiful poet. Won't write very much. Writes popular songs mostly. They're very good. It means that the Greeks have got better popular songs

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than anybody else. But about the title. It's a quotation from the Reverend Ian Paisley making a speech about Roman Catholics, in the Oxford Union, at the time when I was writing the poem. In the course of which he said: "The Roman Catholic church is still the scarlet woman offering up pancakes to the Queen of Babylon." And in fact I've found that in the authorized version it's close to being a scriptural quotation. I didn't know, and nobody knew this, I just thought it frightfully funny. He's very rude. As I wanted to have some secret tinge of the sacred about this poem, which is a religious poem, I thought I'd put that in. I wanted to call it "Illuminations," but that didn't seem to work, or "Epiphanies." I have an affection for that particular poem, although it's so difficult. I think it's not ever going to be a popular poem, to put it mildly.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that George Seferis's poetry loses much in translation?

LEVI

Almost inevitably. Yes. More than most poets do.

INTERVIEWER

What was he like?

LEVI

Great and god-like. Gleeful in his humor, immensely courteous, profoundly subtle, typical Asia Minor Greek. I have a sympathy with them because my grandparents came from Istanbul. I find there are characteristics, expecting certain kinds of behavior, behaving in certain ways, mutations of ordinary behavior, mutations of a sense of honour, of generosity, of suspicion—mutations of everything, I've recognized among Asia Minor Greeks, but not elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

You see Seferis as mutated?

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LEVI

Yes, he was. But one of the most important things about him, as somebody, I think it was Auden, said, was that the worst disaster that he suffered was the fall of Smyrna, its destruction by the Turks, in his childhood. It's like having lived through the Trojan war. You're not the same after that. English poets, on the whole, have suffered no public calamity. There's been no public calamity in this country, for an awful long time. But there were other things which affected Seferis. The two things which he was most interested in, in public life, were the 1939 War, about which his feelings were passionate, and Cyprus. And in both, he was active and with a headlong commitment, that's quite certain. The last thing was the Colonels. And during most of the years when I knew him, the Colonels had Greece. I came to respect him as I never expect to respect any other human being, for his behavior at that time. We became very close friends because of the pressure of that time. We saw entirely eye to eye about it. He was infinitely important in his own country then, because he was already a Nobel prize poet, and had a personal weight, a personal authority which is quite outside ordinary experience. He was as formidable as Maurice Bowra, and more profound. And was the only Greek who'd got the Nobel Prize for poetry, and virtually invented modern Greek Literature. He was immensely grand. On the other hand, I being younger, having less to lose, was in a small way active in a way that he couldn't be. But I would never do anything without asking his advice about it. And so we became very close friends.

INTERVIEWER

Is this political activity you're referring to?

LEVI

I don't much want to talk about it. George was marvellous, like a rock, as when he made his great statement against the Colonels. It was one of the most moving things I've ever heard in my life. What else about George do you want to

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know? About his poetry? Well, it's very good, it's not like anyone else's, it's more political than anyone has said, but it's largely about love, and loneliness. It's what you might call free verse, but if you think that's free. . . it's not free in any loose sense.

INTERVIEWER

Why haven't you translated him yourself?

LEVI

I've lectured on him, that's enough. There are people whose job it is to translate Modern Greek poetry and I see no reason to offer an alternative to that. It's been done. In fact I think that it fails, because I don't think he can be translated into modern English. I don't know why he can't, but I have a notion. There are plenty of writers who can't be translated into a given language at a given time. Try putting Catullus or Ovid into modern English. You can't do it. George, I think, probably translated better into French, but then my ear for French might not be good enough to tell.

INTERVIEWER

You say that he invented modern Greek poetry. Was there an active group or movement of writers in Greece that he was involved with? Such as the writers mentioned in Henry Miller's *Colossus of Maroussi.*

LEVI

Oh no, that's rather romanticized I think. Henry Miller is a marvelous, intuitive, warm, sympathetic man. He's a sort of genius without talent. He's got talent as well, so that can't be right. . . there's something missing.

INTERVIEWER

Craft?

LEVI

No, he's a damn good craftsman. His uncontrol is very de-

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liberate. I'm not going to be the man to knock Henry Miller, whom I admire greatly. But there is something lacking. Not as bad as what was lacking in Aldous Huxley. But if somehow you could mate Aldous Huxley with Henry Miller, you might have a marvelous writer. People have the limitations of their virtues.

INTERVIEWER

Then you didn't experience this world of going around to cafés and telling stories. . .

LEVI

No, it wasn't in my day. Remember that George had to work for his living. He got into the diplomatic service by passing examinations which took him some trouble to pass. Ever afterwards he would remember the French word for things like a back scratcher and a soup ladle. I don't know whether the Greek foreign office uses a lot of back scratchers and soup ladles, but if they needed to he could have remembered the words for them. In fact, he was a linguistic genius. One of very few people of whom I would say that, whom I've ever met. He could correct the French of a Frenchman, and he would do it. He would say, "You don't really mean it like that, you mean this." And he would correct my English, which isn't bad, dammit. When I was writing something he would say, "No, but surely what you mean to express is so and so," and he'd be right. There was nobody in Greece who knew Greek as well as he did, except, he thought, possibly Gatsos.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know Katsimbalis?

LEVI

Yes. Sweet, warm, very entertaining man. What he's done for Greek literature has been very important. His edition, of an earlier poet you won't know, Palamas, is the model literary

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edition in the whole Greek language, a model for any language, it's so good. It's about twenty-five volumes. His annual Bibliography of Greek writers, and studies of Greek writers, is standard, and must have been a hellish labor. At the same time, he managed to be the most entertaining companion one could possibly have.

INTERVIEWER

If I may return to your own writing, perhaps you could say something about the way you approach your work. Do you have any sort of writing routine?

LEVI

I write when I have the leisure to. Up until last Christmas it's been when I didn't have a lot of unanswered letters. Do you remember Lowell speaks somewhere about a "malignant surf of unanswered letters?" I know what he means. Or after doing some job, when I felt I really deserved a few days to myself. And frequently I write poetry when I think, Now I have leisure; now I have peace; now I can do some scholarly thing. I sit down at my desk and it isn't a scholarly thing at all; I write poetry for a few days. But I seldom write more than a poem a fortnight. Sometimes, three in three days. Very occasionally two in a day. A poem can take two or three days to finish, usually two at the most because I can't stand the strain, can't hold it together. Though sometimes I go back to an old poem and finish it, when I thought I was going to leave it unfinished for ever. Suddenly one feels relaxed and gleeful, and does anything.

INTERVIEWER

Could you say something about the way a poem begins for you?

LEVI

Which poem?

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INTERVIEWER

Any poem.

LEVI

Well, let me see, give me the book. [It was his *Collected Poems*] Poem #130. That was a rhythm mostly. I had in mind a lot of mere images, which are no use at all in themselves. Anyone can have an image. You do find in the *Times Literary Supplement,* and places like that, poems simply consisting of an image. And one image, fixed well, can be a poem. But I think I've never carried that off. Do you remember Lawrence Durrell on roses? "This is not the rose of Nostradamus"... you just end up by thinking of this rose. I'd been living in Dorset, I'd seen all the things in that poem, #130, I'd had a couple of lines running in my head, as any poet usually would have a couple of lines on the boil. If they get really good, you write them down, or you get so excited you write a poem. The last part of the poem has the rather elusive line, "I will be the mad Hermit of these woods." There was a wood at home called Mad Bess Woods. And there was an old lady who we used to call Mad Bess. Couldn't have been the original Mad Bess of Mad Bess Woods; she must just have been a mad village woman. Anyway I imagined these people as living like hermits and being very strange people. That's where that comes from. #147, "Ballad," is an experiment in a particular kind of rhythm, owing I suppose something to Auden but I think not much. "Notebook Homage to Brancusi," number 150, was written because some charming man, whose name I've forgotten, wrote me a sweet letter, saying "Would you supply a poem for me, for a book of homage to Brancusi. It is very important for us in Rumania. And I will translate it into Rumanian and we will print it." It seemed to me to be so funny and odd and nice that I thought I would. But I couldn't see what to write or how to write it. So I wrote it first in terms of a post-card that was lying on my desk. Sooner or later everything on my desk creeps into my poems. And I wrote it rather by a similar technique to "Pancakes." There's

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a couple of proverbs in there which I got from rifling through a book of proverbs. When at a loss, I think the thing to do is to look at some poem which is completely unlike the thing that you are now doing, or a prose writer, or a book of proverbs. It isn't that you use what you find. It's that it sets you off in some new direction. For this poem the proverbs are: "It takes an acre to keep a peewit," and "Fog in March" comes also from somewhere. But most of it is about some old post cards I had in front of me.

INTERVIEWER

It's really a very varied experience, then, the way in which the writing of your poems occurs.

LEVI

Yes. I write from notebooks. I'm never without them. See, I can lose things in there, and know it doesn't matter, because sooner or later you're going to need something. Now you're in the rich hour where you've got something useless, but you feel you could use, so you write it down. For one long poem I can exhaust three years of notebooks. Go through every minable inch in them; find everything in them I can possibly use. Because whatever is in a notebook, has somehow been thought about, seemed to be important at the time. Would you like to hear some?

INTERVIEWER

Of course.

LEVI

(Reading from his notebook.) "From the whole *Agamemnon* [Aeschylus', I would have meant], which I have read over in enormous detail with William, from the point of view of poetry, two phrases stuck in my head: The blood dew and the corn's birth pangs, the saffron yellow drops, and the wine of bitter grapes. Paris graffito: "Les oreilles ont des murs." Ears have walls. The saintly faces and the unpretentious expres-

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sions of photographers, circa 1900. One could have invented Muybridge from seeing old photographs, even down to the lemons. I open the door and flies swarm in, I close the door and it's too warm again. Life gets kinda aimless, don't it? Two things I might not have known if I hadn't been told: one, that I have a soul, two, that if I were a slave I would lack dignity. Aren't they both in a way formulations of the consciousness of nineteenth century society? Heavy tree sprawled like a dog in its own shade." There's a little unprinted epigram here. It's called "October Revolution."

Oh spring is a battalion tricked out in green
But summer's dark artillery thunders unseen
Autumn is a regiment uniformed and fine
But winter is a dead brigade, standing in line.

Then there's quite a funny note about American millionaires, who are proposed benefactors of Campion Hall. [*Campion Hall is a college within Oxford University, where Mr. Levi formerly taught Classics and related subjects.*] "The annual day of the millionaires at Campion Hall. Old, pale, leather faced. I like the oldest and toughest better than the younger kinder ones. They're splendid old buzzards, slow and polite, lacking only Groucho Marx. They are the ghosts, infinitely removed, of cowboy heroes, Texas Rangers. And their correctness and generosity are the ghosts of that amazing epiphany in England; the Americans of the 1940s. They are agreeing to be tricked. They won't really be convinced, and they'll fight back in detail. But they want to believe, and to be generous. Their eyes are intensely sad. What we have in common, is that in the last analysis, we despise money. That we should respect their possession of it, and they our need of it, is a courteously played out game. But they have been betrayed a lot of times, and for them, every such game is end game. They can't any longer find anyone they believe in who believes in them." Footnote: "In fact in the end they won." We didn't get any money. They were marvelous. I really liked

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them. You know what I mean about the Americans of the 1940s—it was the War.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you like them?

LEVI

They were all so generous and they were going to die. For us. It's one hell of a long way from Minnesota to here. They were much more different from each other than Americans one meets nowadays. I can remember an American private soldier, coming up to me on a train, and explaining to me about the yellow peril and how it was all in the Bible.

INTERVIEWER

The yellow peril?

LEVI

Yes. How the Bible had explained how the Japanese and the Chinese were going to overwhelm the world. You know it's not usual, there really aren't any Americans like that anymore. I've never met any, not even in America. There are, still, in England, if you really poke about, but very few.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see general differences between American and English poetry?

LEVI

Yes, of course. It's to do with rhythm, isn't it? The rhythms of American speech are different from English, or may I say insular, because the word "English" is ambiguous; we all speak English. The rhythms are quite different and produce a different set of things. After all Shakespeare didn't know he was a Beat poet until it was pointed out by Anselm Hollo. I think that's who pointed it out. It's true that there is a perfectly good Beat line in a Shakespeare Sonnet. Can you guess it?

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Let me not to the marriage of true minds!
admit impediments.

INTERVIEWER

That's a Beat line?

LEVI

Oh perfect. Upward beat, not pentameter. . . perfect. You have to try to pronounce it with an American accent. *(Repeats it, then:)*

I have seen the best brains of my generation starving hysterical naked

It's the same, isn't it? *(And then quotes a line from Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard")*

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket

It's different, isn't it? I don't think an English poet would have written that. There are marvellous rhythms in insular English but they're not the same as that. It's a very good provincial variety of our language. A language of which all varieties are now provincial. There is no metropolis of the language. Or if there is it's bloody not London. Nor is it New York. Nor is it some English department at a college. There's only provinical English. There is a sort of Queen's English, as it's spoken here, but that's neither here nor there.

INTERVIEWER

Auden was concerned that the quality of the English language be preserved, and he hoped to help to do that with his writing.

LEVI

I think it's nonsense. Do you think that Ausonius should have written in Burgundian?

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INTERVIEWER

What?

LEVI

Ausonius is an excellent Latin poet, who was surrounded by what he regarded as barbarous Burgundians who put butter in their hair, a characteristic that he thought foul. What he chose to do was write lovely pale imitations of Virgil. Highly successful. In a kind of Latin that almost nobody was speaking then. Few people could have appreciated how good he was. Should he have learned a Germanic language, or Burgundian? Perhaps. I'm just trying to say that whoever you are, you've got to start from where you are. If you're a sailor, and only know sailor's language, well, write in it, for God's sake.

INTERVIEWER

You don't see anything in the idea that the language is being let go?

LEVI

Well, I don't think it was Auden that said that, I think it was Eliot. If Auden said that he was trying to do it then he was just trying to put on Eliot's top hat, which was too big for him as it was for the Bradford Millionaire. And as it was for Eliot too. You can't protect the language. You can drive out bad writing by good writing only because the public reads your works and not the other works. Therefore it's the readers who do it, not the writer. Language lives in the mouth.

INTERVIEWER

Some people think that Auden is overrated. Do you?

LEVI

There's bound to be a reaction against him, but it's a bit of a bore, when you get to be my age, living through all that. I've already lived through being told that Yeats is not good,

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and then being told that oh now we're allowed to like him again, being told that Eliot is overrated, and being told now that he is the greatest of great poets, the same with Pound and now the same with Auden. Why can't people make up their bloody minds? I haven't thought through exactly what I think about Auden. It seems to me indelicate to do it. I like him, he was my friend. He was decent to me when I was much younger than him. He can't perish as a poet. He's got to be admitted, to be remembered. You can't just ignore him. As to who he's better or worse than, I can't say.

INTERVIEWER

What about Yeats? In *Travels to Afghanistan* you say in a note: "If Yeats were more interested in the real nature of everything I would find him a more necessary poet."

LEVI

I think that's true, yes. We're speaking of dolphins, aren't we. He doesn't really care what dolphins are really like, does he? Platonic allegory—it's not my scene. Yeats is a great poet. He almost is necessary but not quite. My distinction of poems is not between great and minor, which has somehow been taken over by the academics, and has become silly, trifling. The distinction I would make would be between, first, poets and not-poets. To be not a poet is not to be able to write a coherent poem, or not to write any poems, or to write a lot of non-poems. And there are quite famous people who would fall in this category. Really, it's just a kind of craft criticism. I don't see what they're up to. Then there's poets and good poets. A good poet is someone who's written, not a couple of good lines, but something that really makes you sit up and pay serious attention, take your hat off to the man. Allen Ginsburg is a good poet. But then I think there's necessary and unnecessary poets. This is absolutely vital. How you judge them is, assuming that you have a wide selection on your shelf, who you take with you on a journey and who you can do without. Great poets I don't know about. Yeats I

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read about twice a year. Necessary poets are those without whom the language would lack some mutation, some important thing. This would include: Henry Vaughan, John Clare, Christopher Smart, Walter Raleigh...do you see what I mean? You can't deny that they're good poets, but no one person would be likely to maintain that they were all great poets. But I can do without Browning, except for a few poems.

INTERVIEWER

Do you count Yeats as necessary?

LEVI

Almost.

We dreamed that a great painter had been born
To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn

Oh, that's a good line.

To that stern color, and that delicate line
Which are our secret discipline
Wherein the gazing heart doubles its might

It's terribly good. But surely, in the last line, "might," "wherein," "gazing"—it's a bit inflated isn't it? If you want to take Yeats down a peg or two, try saying it in a terrific Southern Irish brogue. *(He does).* He makes his poems out of nothing. Richard Selig first said that to me. He said the trouble with Yeats is that his poems are air and water, nothing in it. There isn't anything there, dammit, when you look at it. I see what Selig means.

INTERVIEWER

Yeats's strength is mostly aural.

LEVI

He makes a kind of compelling noise, doesn't he? He's the

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ancient mariner all right. Yeats worked from notes too. One of the most impressive things that I know about him comes from his notebooks. He writes out in prose several times, beginnings for a poem. He starts out by saying: "I have often taken off my clothes, both fast and slowly, for this or that woman." He goes on in that boring, silly old man's way. Very embarrassing. And then, do you know what the first lines of that poem are?

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees

It makes me cry it's so beautiful. If you're a poet, when you start to write, then you are serious. Or you'd better be. None of us can be serious all the time. To be serious in that sense requires a lot of things such as being relaxed beforehand, things like love and generosity, and discipline, and a sufficient degree of venom. Self-hatred, love of others, hatred of others...all these things you need...whatever is the right mixture for you.

INTERVIEWER

It's been said of your poetry that frequently it is of a private nature. Do you feel that it is?

LEVI

I rather think that that has to do with my having been a clergyman. People suppose that I had reserved thoughts, that I couldn't possibly believe all those things I was supposed to be believing, or behaving in all those ways I was supposed to be behaving, and there must be some kind of secret message to be read in the poems, something breaking out. Well, I think everything was stated perfectly plainly. I said exactly what I thought and felt. Now maybe what I thought and felt was so obscure and peculiar, my own life has been so odd, that it is of no interest to the rest of the world, that's perfectly possible. I applaud the world if it thinks that.

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INTERVIEWER

You don't think, then, that you're a private poet.

LEVI

Oh I may be. I rather like the notion—I think it's Italian—of Hermetic Poetry. Since I heard of it it's always seemed to me to be what I was trying to do. To distill experience in such a way in language, that people who read what you've written, can sense and understand the experience that lies behind the words. They know what you're talking about, but they don't necessarily, or shouldn't need to know your whole autobiography as it might appear in a police court, or before the throne of God. Most of the time when I'm being elusive in poems, it's a private joke for me, or for one other person to whom it's dedicated. It's not ever been necessary to the understanding of the poem.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any poets with whom you work closely?

LEVI

Well, there are those to whom I show things and whose opinions I value. Absolutely anyone who happens to be available at the time, for whom I have respect. In Oxford, now; John Wain, Sally Purcell, Andrew Harvey. Other friends who are not poets. The critic I most value is my wife.

INTERVIEWER

Could you say something about why you write poetry?

LEVI

George Seferis in a diary speaks of life, without writing poems, as a disorder. I remember thinking when I read that first, it's the opposite. Poems are a disorder. However necessary and desirable, however protecting the survival of the brute life of childhood, a disorder. But now after a long time of not writing poems, I see he's right. Without writing one

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just piles up like heaps of leaves. One doesn't know what is happening or who one is. And soon one will not dare ask, perhaps, any honest question. Or worse, one may stumble unguarded on some honest answer. Because there is no way of knowing the implications of feeling, except of precise feeling, of something quite exact, as happens in a poem. It is as if poetry were a continual whale spouting or breathing. And yet this is not why one writes poetry. One writes it because of the things themselves, and the words themselves, and the people themselves.

INTERVIEWER

Would you like to give any advice to young writers?

LEVI

Yes. Steer clear of the writing departments of universities. Steer clear of English. Learn foreign, preferably dead languages, but learn them properly. Do not be a wastrel, don't just hang about the world. Poetry is about life. The quality of your poetry will be the quality of your life. And you can't regulate that by a knob. Read. Get or get near a very good library. Take more notice of Randall Jarrell than you do of any academic critic. Don't spend time attacking other writers. Dig to the bottom of your mind, and don't give two damns about publications.

Writing is like breathing or it ought to be. One's got to write poems. Like one has to go to church. Not out of social duty, or because there's any pressure on one to do so. Not even out of reaction to people who say one shouldn't do so. But just because of some decent, natural good behavior. One might as well go on with it.

—Jannika Hurwitt

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Jean Follain

Eleven Poems From D'Après Tout

Tied Shoe

When evening breaks up
its mass of clouds
the grass fire can be seen
raising its smokes
flowers come up in the ravines
a little of the day is left
as a boy in an iron-grey smock
leans toward the ruts in the road
to tie his shoe
with no boredom about life
no trace of absence.

Simple Expectation

Something like lamplight shines
on the face of this man seated
near a naked woman turned to stone.
The gardens are becoming undone
the hillside bearing blackish houses.
Everything adjusts to honor
after the time of love.
He watches the weather's sepia
then goes by the stoves to wait.

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Face The Animal

It is not always easy
to face the animal
even if it looks at you
without uneasiness or hate
it does so fixedly
and seems to disdain
the subtle secret it bears
it seems to feel more strongly
the evidence of the world
that which drills and damages
the soul—day and night
in noise, in silence.

Not Everything Is Spoken

From evening to morning
in this pure place
the animals pass without thought
the trees tremble
the reflecting pool is stagnant
deserts pursue their mirages.
Those of the human race go by.
Not everything is spoken
the most beautiful woman shouts.

The Real Child

The sky grows overcast
in a convent near sculpted animals
nuns come and go
looking masked and gloved by shade
like before the time of reforms
but in the middle of the sunny town

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in a treeless square
practicing the lash
on his wooden top
a child stays very real
with no killed time.

Solitary Inkwell

There is a mushroom called
solitary inkwell
also black egg
it stands with no others around it
approached by white animals
the hedge appears to be on fire
the heart of a woman passing by
beats hard inside her
she is seeing so far-off again
the ocean waves
she crosses the narrow bridge and then
the houses of the outskirts
come carrying rays of light.

Thief

The heart of the cows
beats in the meadow
a man is coming to steal their milk
striding in the coolness of the dew
he neither loves nor hates
for him alone time stops
the sun at its height in the sky
then he can do nothing but sleep
repudiating
childhood and adulthood and old age.
If he passes, it does no good to cry:
Wait.

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In This Light

In this full daylight
you can see the empty bowl
on the table
at the bottom reflections
and shadows play
among those passing by
one picks up a needle
as the sky darkens
and no lamps are lit.
A soft body fills itself with silence.
With evening again will come
pictures from memory.

Light The Lamps

The eyelets of the corset
cast their reflections
closed venetian blinds
protect a world
whose illusion
is about to fall.
The hour has the flavor of its time.
So light the lamps
someone says
see here
it's night.

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Constancy

Clothes fall one by one
in complete peace a body bares itself
outside the houses
barns light up
the nightworkers
are still sleeping
a woman will make a dream with no outcome
a man with a child's face
will be pushing a handcart
full of uniforms
their gold trim gone.

Journey

Under the evening sun
dry bread keeps
a taste of the legend
the wound sustained when the thorn was removed
calms the aroused soul
hamlets appear around the bend
trees make signs
people in black enter a house
the traveller follows the lines
of the ruts in the road with his eyes
birds shriek
the zenith where a star points
does not move.

Translated by
Heather McHugh

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The One-Star Jew

David Evanier

Stiff as a ramrod, a straight arrow, six foot three, his face a starched white, Isaac Zavelson stands in the elevator beside some of the other employees of Jews for Israel, waiting for it to move. Entering the building, he has saluted the American flag and the Israeli flag. In his hand he is holding an envelope addressed Hon. Richard Nixon, San Clemente, Calif. Inside the envelope is a birthday card. Zavelson heads the Ethnics division of the organization. He is sixty-one. Under him are shorter men than he, more indecisive men, who shuffle when they walk, who do not speak English as well as Yiddish, who like to remain on the sidelines. Zavelson drives them hard—a ten-hour day, and weekends—except Ruthie. Zavelson takes long lunch hours with Ruthie at her apartment; they return to the office beaming, and, forgetting, immediately send down for lunch. Ruthie did not climb the ladder to get her position and salary, or wait ten years as the others did in the department. In order to move her up more quickly, Zavelson became impatient with one of his men, Mendel Berger.

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Zavelson took away his desk, his Israeli flag, and made Mendel sit on a chair by himself in the corner waiting for assignments. Mendel packed his things and left one day. Ruthie was given his job.

A man enters the elevator, and moves into the corner as much as possible: a thin man in his mid-fifties, with a beard and a moustache, his gray hair forming a ponytail in the back, held together by a rubber band. He wears a sports jacket from Klein's, has a red handkerchief in his back pants pocket, and carries a dungaree bag over his shoulder, his initials sewn on the bag in suede: L.G. for Luther Glick. He has a paperback in his hand—Zavelson peers sharply at the title: *The Way and The Light* by Krishna Ramanujam. Luther is just returning from a month's vacation.

"How are you, Luther?" Zavelson says.

"Tip top."

"Luther!" barks Zavelson. "So when will you read a Jewish book for a change, a novelty?"

Luther Glick pauses. "I'm not a six-star Jew like you, Isaac."

Zavelson laughs his polite laugh. "I am a full-fledged, proud Jew, Luther. I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"You know, Isaac," Luther begins, "there are other things, other states of consciousness in this world beside—"

But the elevator has opened again, and Zavelson has marched out, leaving Luther with his unfinished sentence. Luther shakes his head, and joins the line into the office.

Luther is a member of the three-man publicity crew, or, as he calls himself, a "minion" of Jews for Israel. He walks slowly this morning, his first day back at work, for Luther is tired. He is not a well man. He has had four heart attacks. And he spent six hours the previous night kneeling on the wooden floor of a church attic in Westchester with six others (all of whom happen to have been Jewish) who are interested in a new Buddhist sect in the neighborhood. Luther is not a member, but, with the new "cosmic consciousness" he discovered five years ago, he is searching.

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II

Jews for Israel (or JFI) is not a place for listeners. Almost everyone there has finished with listening. So Luther is not surprised by Zavelson's behavior. I am not used to it, as I have only been with the publicity staff for six months and am, by twenty years, the youngest member of the organization. Our department occupies a corner of the office—a glass alcove for our head, Stephen Greenberg, and two desks on the outside for myself and Luther. Luther sits behind me. He greets me, our obese secretary Bea, whom he calls "Queenie," and our second secretary Jill. Luther waters his plants, lights his pipe, thumbs through his copy of *Ms.*, and unfolds today's *New York Times.* He settles back.

III

Luther has spent his month's vacation in the New England area. First he traveled to Vermont with his wife for the trial of one of my predecessors in this job, the man who sat at my desk ten years ago: Rom Schwartz. Rom, a poet, teacher, and the son of a world-famous Jewish scholar, was on trial for murdering his wife with a pick-axe. The two children testified against him. He was found guilty. Luther tells me that he went up to Rom while the trial was still going on, held out his hand and said, " 'Rom—Glick, Luther Glick, from JFI. You may not remember me. I was a colleague. Rom, if you want somebody to just lend an ear, someone to talk to, I'll be glad to come back and see you tonight.' He looked at me, and he had a glazed air, as if he was far away, and suddenly he smiled—just for a moment—Rom's old smile—a light of recognition—I think—of who I was, and then that look of despair came back, and he said, 'I'm just so—' and he couldn't say any more—he choked—and walked away with his lawyers." Luther did not stay for the remainder of the trial, but has brought back the newspaper clippings from the Vermont newspaper about the trial which he shows to me, Stephen Greenberg, and our two secretaries.

(Rom, who was sentenced to thirty years, has changed his

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mailing address in the Poets' Yearbook from his Vermont home to the jail in which he is staying.)

Stephen Greenberg, a short man also in his mid-fifties with a round cherubic face, is seated listening to Luther, his short hands folded in his lap, his feet not touching the floor, shaking his head. When he is not at JFI, Stephen is a scholar and historian, the author of more than twenty books. One book he has been working on for years is a biography of Rom's father, who bequeathed him his private papers when he died.

As to the second half of the trip—which he had taken alone, without his wife—Luther is less communicative. Luther had been carrying on an intense correspondence with Molly Bethune, the Maine author of the best-seller about living the simple country life, in tune with the lakes, the forest and the birds. Before the book became widely known, Luther had been delighted with it and had mailed Molly Bethune a cassette in which he talked about himself, his life, his new consciousness and her book. She had been taken with it, and in turn mailed Luther a cassette.

Luther had been very excited by this contact with an author whose book began to move up the best-seller lists, and whose picture on the jacket was of an attractive woman in her thirties. He had told us that he had planned to travel in the vicinity of Maine—"Molly's territory," he had said with a possessive, intimate smile—but he would not elaborate. He had let it hang. Now we both ask him about Maine.

"I was there," he says, and doesn't seem to want to go on. Then he says, "I didn't see Molly."

"Not only didn't he see her," says Stephen to me in his glass cubicle as soon as Luther has gone out to lunch, "he told me he didn't even call her. Luther probably didn't tell you this, David, but—" Stephen begins, crossing his legs. Stephen is a gossip, but the most unmalicious one I have ever met. He really cares about Luther.

"—This is really quite moving. After Luther and Molly Bethune exchanged a few more cassettes, one day last fall she

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writes him that she is coming to New York. She gives him the name of the hotel, she gives him her room number, and she tells him the *time* she will be there. Luther was so excited. He talked about it for weeks. He had two of her books but he had a hell of a time tracking down the third—a poetry book. The crisis became finding that third early book—he had a search service looking for it. Finally he had all three books. Then the time came. He was in quite a state. He put on a modern suit and tie.

"Well, he didn't see Molly. He took her three books and rode the subway to her publishing house. He walked in the door, and stood before the receptionist, who didn't know him from Adam. 'Look,' he said, 'my name is Glick. I have here all three of Molly Bethune's books. She knows who I am. Would you ask her to autograph them for me?' The receptionist shrugged and said that she would try. Luther returned in a few days to pick up the books. They were autographed."

IV

I remember one of the first things Luther said to me. It was on the third morning of my first week at the office. He was sniffling. "You know," he said, "sometimes I'm crazy—foolish, just like my wife says. I sleep in the nude. There was a storm last night. I woke up, went down to the kitchen, and then I just walked out into my back yard. I just walked on the grass, the water pouring down on me, looking up at the sky."

V

Since he returned from his vacaton, Luther has spent several nights with another sect, a Nichiren Buddhist group. They hold their services in the home of a woman he knows. "Last night they set up the new altar," he tells me. "The leader, a black man, kept making it parallel, and then he started the service. He stopped it again. 'It's too low,' he said. He's six foot four, by the way. So all of his little flunkies started lifting it.

"This leader," Luther continues, "is thin as a pencil, all

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teeth. When he smiles, you see teeth. He stopped the services again in the middle, annoyed, and turned to the woman who donates her house for the evening: 'When we chant,' he says, the leader should be predominantly heard. If others chant louder than the leader, the leader is not heard and cannot lead.' She smiled and shook her head, thanking the leader for the whipping, and said she would be quieter. The Nichiren Buddhists stress positive benefits. This same woman testified to the positive effects of chanting: in order to get compensation from her medical insurance, she had to produce evidence of medical bills of several years ago. A letter had arrived that day from her doctor with a large contemporary bill, which he dated, by mistake, several years back. So she submitted the doctor's mistakenly dated bill. She didn't question the honesty of what she was doing...

"The chanting," Luther concludes, "sounds like a railing buzz. It's hard to take at first."

VI

I am replacing Melvin Bronstein, who sat at this desk for ten years. Rom Schwartz was here earlier, and it is Mel who most people at JFI talk about. "A saint," they all say, looking at me as if it would be impossible for me to be as good, as useful as Mel was to them. Mel died three months before I arrived.

There are pictures on the wall of the three of them: Stephen, Luther and Mel. Luther and Stephen's memories are of their long association with Mel, sharing his tribulations. They talk about how Mel could never turn away from anyone, could never say no, of his alcoholism, of how his wife helped to destroy him: his wife with her three-inch high heels that drilled holes into the floor of his car, and who did not come to Mel's funeral because she wanted to see California. They talked about the huge hotel bills his wife racked up on credit cards while Mel was in the hospital because she said she could not bear to be at home alone. The finance companies still call the office and are upset to hear they have lost Mel.

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"Kind, wonderful Mel," the people in the office all say. They shake their heads. "He was too good for this world."

Except Luther. "I never liked him," says Luther. "He should have been a whore. He could never say no. He had no backbone." Luther thinks about that for a moment and adds, "That's true of Stephen as well.

"Mel used to say to me, looking away, not facing me, never facing me, when he sat at your desk, 'You know, Luther, I wasn't always like this. There are certain things that do something to people.' Well, he was trying to tell me—trying to hint that once there was a stronger, angrier Melvin: a dynamo. But I didn't believe that for one minute."

They both talk about the extra little jobs Mel took on at the office. He drew signs.

"Signs?" I say.

"Sure," Luther explains. "Like 'Quiet Please,' 'No Smoking,' 'Admission Two Dollars,' 'This Way Out' and so forth. Whenever the secretaries needed a sign for one of our dinners or rallies, they would come to Melvin. He printed very well. Watch out, David. They'll be asking you."

"We'll never forget his last party," Stephen says. "We just arrived, me and Luther, and we were standing in his living room. We smelled smoke. 'Mel, there's a fire!' we said.

"Mel looked at us and beamed his beatific smile, and said, 'No, no, it's nothing. Nothing is wrong. Everything's fine. My daughter had a little problem earlier but it was resolved.'

"We had to take his word. But the smell got worse and worse, and the smoke was filling the living room. Finally we said, 'Mel, you better do something.' He insisted nothing was wrong, but Luther and I opened the door to the next room.

"What we saw was amazing. The entire room was burnt to a crisp. There was water and debris everywhere. Everything was black and charred. Water buckets stood in a row. The remaining pieces of wood were crackling. The walls were charred. The smoke was heavy. Mel's daughter had set fire to

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her room an hour before the party."

They both shake their heads. "Where is the daughter now?" I ask.

"In a mental institution."

I look at Mel's face in the pictures. He has a blank, brown corduroy look. He smiles. I look for traces of him in the desk. There are none.

I ponder the fate of my predecessors at this desk.

VII

I look behind me. Luther is doing twenty-five push-ups on the floor. He touches his toes twenty-five times. He prepares his lunch. It is bright on his desk: carrots, celery, tomatoes, chicken, okra, an orange, and a quart of skimmed milk. He talks about his new consciousness.

"Nowhere is it written that I have to be numero uno. That's the most important thing I've learned, David. I know where it came from originally. I was a skinny malink of a kid . . . my brother, though, was a husky busker. And my grandfather was a butcher. That's how it started.

"When I went back to Toronto after some years, there was no excitement on my grandfather's part about my arrival . . . nothing. Then my brother came down the street. My grandfather dashed across the street to him. He brought him into the kitchen. He plunked black bread on the table, sour cream, sat my brother down and said 'Eat!' I noticed the difference.

"I used to be so influenced by what other people thought . . . and that was *so wrong*. Competition is nonsense. Nature did not decree that it be this way.

"I began reading books about different religions. I realized, and formulated for myself, that there are just two things, David, that we need: peace and purpose. Peace and purpose. I found that I disagreed with not one thing about Islam, one thing about Buddhism (can't remember which), and many things about Judaism.

"Have you heard of an author who signs his name, 'The

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Gentleman With a Duster?' "

I said that I hadn't.

"I've been looking for his novel for ten years. I read it as an impressionable youth, but it would have more meaning for me today: *Julius Levine.* It was about a young man who searches out an erudite uncle to teach him about Judaism. But the uncle talks about the East—he isn't hung up on Judaism. He knows all the religions have wisdom.

"People around here aren't tuned in to this wave length. Being a truth-seeker isn't an easy thing.

"You know, David, recently I had an experience. Alvin was someone I knew thirty-five years ago. I used to sneer at him. He was an astrology expert, a truth-seeker even then. He has become a big business success. On an impulse, I took a journey to see him.

"I traveled far. When I arrived, I went up to his offices. When I saw him in the hall I said, 'Hello, Alvin,' and Alvin threw his arms around me, flashing his smile. I was conscious of his admiration.

"I sez to him, I sez, 'I recognize that lovely smile, Alvin—your father had it when he greeted strangers. But you don't know me. Glick. Luther Glick.'

"He closed his eyes, opened them, recognized me, and threw his arms about me.

"He took me into his private office. He sat down behind his desk, and I sat facing him. 'I have a series of questions for you, Alvin.'

" 'Shoot,' he sez. 'Anything you want to know.'

" 'Alvin, when did your daydreams stop . . .?'

"He paused; then he said, 'I don't remember.'

"Then I asked, 'What do you say when people scorn you for your seances, for your ideas, when they laugh at you? How can you stand it?'

"And Alvin smiled broadly, paused for a long time and said, 'Nothing. *I know what I know.*' "

Luther smiled at me, repeating the phrase, shaking his head in admiration.

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VIII

Luther has many scrapbooks in the office. He saves clippings about events, books, but mainly about people he admires. He has two Norman Mailer scrapbooks: Mailer stabbing his wife, Mailer running for Mayor of New York and answering a reporter's question about what he will do if he is elected to clear up the snow: "I will piss on it."

Luther is reading the *Rolling Stone* interview with Mailer. "Jesus!" he keeps exclaiming. Then he says, "Listen to this. The man's insight is amazing. Charles Manson chose horseshit—not dogshit or human shit—because his girls came from upper class homes where they had been around horses all their lives. He had them roll in horseshit. It was much less objectionable and more familiar." Luther looks up, giving me that same admiring smile, inviting me to share his admiration with him.

I look up. Stephen is running back and forth with assignments from the director. I have come to realize that he does most of the work. As our secretary Bea says, "Luther panics if he has more than one piece of paper on his desk at one time. Also if he is called into the director's office."

Stephen's face is chalk white from running. "Stephen really knocks himself out, doesn't he?" I say to Luther.

Luther raises his head from the *Rolling Stone*. "Yes. That comes from a sense of responsibility."

IX

Luther takes his job seriously—a possible source of contention between us. "Our standards are not one whit lower than the competition—unless there is a weakening at this desk." He snaps at Jill: "I countermanded my comma after Fink." Or at Bea, who is talking to her husband on the phone: "Hang up. We have priorities. When I open my lips, let no dog bark." Stephen reminds me, "The job is his whole life."

X

The most unpopular person in the office, lately Luther has

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gotten worse. I feel him storming behind me at his desk, his back rigid, his breath war clouds, his fingers tapping. We are talking about China, a country he approves of, especially since Luther firmly believes in the theory of the survival of the fittest. I really don't give a damn about the politics of China, but I do say, "Well, but of course, China is a totalitarian country." On my way out the door at lunchtime, a voice reaches me across the entire length of the floor-through office. "BEFORE YOU GO OUT INTO THE WORLD TO TELL THEM, DAVID, I AM NOT TOTALITARIAN!" Luther's voice carries above the talk of fifty secretaries, the clatter of their typewriters, and the conversations of over one hundred JFI fund-raisers. My hand is on the doorknob. "DAVID! DO YOU HEAR ME!"

I walk slowly back to our desks.

"Tell who, Luther?"

"TOTALITARIAN! TOTALITARIAN! YOU SAID I WAS TOTALITARIAN!"

"I didn't mean you—"

"IN YOUR QUIET WAY, DAVID, YOU REALLY TWIST THE KNIFE."

I try to mollify Luther. I reassure him that I will not talk to anyone about our conversation.

XI

That afternoon, Luther says that he has had a long-standing argument with his wife. She has opened an antique store in Westchester and has wanted Luther to work there on weekends. Thinking of his heart condition, I say,

"When would you rest?"

"During the week at the office, according to her."

He says that immediately after his third heart attack, he continued to work in the garden he loved. He felt like collapsing. His wife and four daughters told him not to do the gardening, but they left it for him.

"They didn't know how I felt . . . it was overwhelming . . . the pain . . . sometimes I thought I would collapse in the com-

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post heap . . . that I would die there . . . but I never told my wife. I was afraid to lose her love . . . her support would continue, but it wouldn't be the same . . . and I gradually got better. I suppose I remember as a boy my father breaking his back in the machine shop with a heart condition. I know how I felt toward him . . . and toward my mother, who was sick too. I hated their illness. It was a drag, going on and on. And I thought my wife would feel that way toward me."

Luther stays late tonight. He talks about his correspondence with Buddies of the Earth recommending Molly Bethune's book to them, we talk about an article concerning an artist who shoots bullets as his art form (Luther asks my opinion of that), and then he suddenly says, straining forward, "You see, my wife left me last night."

PART TWO

I

"Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Krishna."

Luther is chanting behind me. In the last weeks since his wife's departure, he has moved more closely toward mysticism and Eastern religion. Luther chants the words from a file card he holds before him. The book on his empty desk is the *I Ching*.

Before going home this evening, Luther is in an animated mood. He gives me and Bea an example of E.S.P. He shows us his raincoat with a button missing.

"I was walking along at lunch thinking I needed a button . . . then suddenly . . . there on the ground . . ." Luther scoops out a blue button from his pocket and places it against the brown buttons on his raincoat, and says, "Exactly!"

We look at the button. "But it's a different color," we both say.

"It certainly isn't," Luther says, hurt. "It's as close as you could come to finding an exact duplicate—"

"But—" Bea and I say.

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"And it's the same size!"

Luther says angrily, "You hard-nosed rationalists!" Stalking out, he calls out his last words to us: "You people don't know how much a button costs nowadays. . ."

Luther has been dating the woman who has the Buddhist group at her house. She wants Luther to join her circle. She is looking for recruits.

She calls him at the office and asks him how his Buddhism is coming. "You're the master," he tells her over the phone. "There's so much for me to learn—technique, background, rhythm."

He tells me he has had a conversation with her the night before in which he said, "I want to see you and you to see me as more than a member of this group." She replied to him, "I thought you thought that."

She went on to tell Luther that her sex life during the last year with two black men "has been more completely satisfying than ever before."

"She attributes this to the benefits of chanting," Luther comments, "but I don't know—I think she's trying to tell me something."

He says the song that keeps running through his mind is Ray Charles singing "I Can't Stop Loving You."

He reminisces with me about his boyhood, his father, his years in Hollywood, and his wife.

Luther takes out a roll of quarters. "Like my father," he says. "I like to have a lot of change in my pocket, for the sound of having money." He jingles the quarters, and smiles.

"One time, just one time, my father told me about sex. He was standing by the window, and he said 'Come here. Look down there.' I looked down—one flight. We lived one flight above the street. 'You see him?' my father asked me. I saw a kid from the neighborhood: sagging mouth, popping eyes, a lopsided walk. My father said, 'That's what comes from self-abuse. That's all I want to say.' And my father walked away.

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"My father wasn't a violent man. One time I played hookey from school. I remember coming home and an aunt was waiting for me on the corner. She was a mean one; she told me I was going to get it when my father got home. My mother said the same thing. So it built up, and when my father arrived, he saw what was going on. He looked grim. For the first time I saw him reach to his belt and slowly take it off, fingering it. Then he waved me into the next room. When we were alone, he said, 'I have a story to tell you. There was a rowboat out on the sea in a storm. You don't throw away the oars when you're out there.' Then my father hit the bed with his belt three times so they would hear." Luther laughed gently.

"My father invented words without knowing it. Like in his candy store. He'd say 'I have to relemplish my stock.' Or, if I came home late, he'd ask, 'Where have you been pulverooting all night?' "

II

"I was always a questioner. Even as a young man I made waves. I always had to know how things worked, and why. And I was always getting myself into trouble—I was full of piss and vinegar. I worked in Hollywood for a while, at Paramount. There were two categories: extras and wavers. All the wavers were allowed to do in a scene was wave. I was a waver. The extras belong to a union, they got paid more and didn't even fraternize with the wavers. They shunned us.

"As a truth-seeker even then, I got into hot water. The director was giving instructions, see, and he's telling us we should react to a home run in the baseball game with enthusiasm: the extras should cheer, and the wavers should wave. It didn't make sense to me as I understood the script up to that point. I didn't understand what he was getting at. Then he said were there any questions. No one had ever asked questions—it was just a formality. I raised my hand and said, 'Yes. I have a question. Isn't it true that in this scene if we applaud

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this play—'

"I heard murmurs, and then boos and hisses from the extras. There were catcalls. I heard them calling out, *'What gaff! And he's only a waver!'* "

III

On the lunch hour, Stephen says to me, "When his wife walked out on Luther, I wasn't at all surprised. You may not know this, David, but Luther hasn't slept with his wife in five years. He moved out of their bedroom into his own room after his last heart attack. I asked him if he thought the lack of a sexual relationship had affected their marriage. Luther said he had thought of this and he had asked his wife. He said she said no. I also asked him if his daughters and friends were surprised at his wife's leaving. He said no, no one was surprised except himself."

IV

Luther tells me that since his wife has left him he has a funny feeling of weakness in his chest. "I've tried to remember what it was," he says, "and now I do. When I was a boy, looking for a job, out on my own, leaving my mother, I had that feeling."

I ask Luther if the separation isn't a challenge to live a freer life. "No," he replies. "I'm not a WASP. . .I don't want to prove myself. . ."

V

Luther has begun to collect green bottles. He has a shelf of them in his bedroom window. In the morning when he wakes, the bare branches of the trees and the copper of the sun are reflected through them.

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VI

Mornings are Luther's best times. He comes in, announcing that his "evacuation and digestion" are both excellent. He shows me the copper bracelet he wears to cure his arthritis. "The body needs certain minerals," he explains.

On his walk from the garage to the office he frequently sees people who interest him. "I don't want to come into work. I see people I just like, something about their looks and their gait...I want to spend the day with them...a feeling of freedom. But you can't hold on to it...by the afternoon you're back in your suit...

"I saw a girl...very pretty...lollygagging down the street ...I wanted to talk to her. But I had the wrong uniform on. She was wearing jeans. She would have turned off the minute she saw me...

"I hear a guy behind me as I'm walking say, 'I'm getting tired of looking like everybody else.' I turn and I see a guy with a beard, unshaved hair all over his face, torn jeans and sneakers, and he's seated in a hallway talking to three other guys who are dressed exactly the same way." Luther laughs and shakes his head.

VII

He is waiting to see if his wife is serious about the separation. She is living in a single room in the home of friends near her store.

"I've been leaving hard-boiled eggs in the refrigerator. I had one left over, and so in order to know it was the oldest, I drew a cartoon on it. Then, knowing my wife comes by while I'm gone during the day, I drew a little balloon on it with the words, 'Hello, Nosey.' A week went by. I checked the eggs every day and nothing had happened. Then, last night, there it was. She had written—not on the same egg but on another—'Very funny.' Which is her way of saying something to me. She doesn't take a joke well. But it was okay—it

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was her way of talking the same language.''

VIII

Being single again, he has to learn to cook. He puts two saccharine tablets in his soup by mistake.

Jill explains to him: ''If you have three apples and four men, you make applesauce. . .''

''There's a lot more free-wheeling in this cooking business than I thought,'' Luther comments. ''I thought it was scientific.''

He gets information from all the secretaries about cooking, on the difference between a roaster, broiler and pullet. He has a 2½-pound roast beef and wants to know at what heat he should cook it and for how long.

IX

Things are disappearing from Luther's house. His wife is removing them. He finds the bone china cups and saucers that were wedding presents gone. He can't bring himself to object to his wife.

One day the reading lamp over his bed is missing.

He gets up in the morning and goes into the hallway to knot his tie before the mirror. The mirror is gone.

X

His wife notices the effect of the sun on the stained glass lamp in the living room. She is visiting him one evening. She praises the effect. Luther is pleased, as he has placed it there. But then his wife says, ''I think I'll take that with me.''

Luther's house is burgled. He returns home to find the TV set gone. The hi-fi is neatly stacked on the floor, unplugged, ready to go. He must have interrupted the burglers. Now he is afraid they will come back when he is gone, since there is no one at the house.

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XI

Being alone, Luther now rises at six a.m. and listens to a radio program every morning in which blind people talk about their lives.

The word gets around that Luther is single again.

Ann Stark, a woman in the office, is about sixty. She has a beaked nose, a homely face, a dowdy figure, and she carries two shopping bags.

She approaches Luther, and stops several feet from his desk. From that distance, she says "I love you," and walks quickly away.

She does the same thing the next morning.

When she meets Luther at the door, or by the elevator, she whispers, "I love you."

"My speed," Luther comments.

He goes to a singles night at the insistence of a friend. "Not being a gay blade, I was reluctant. But I went. There was a fat woman at the door and a sign that said Admission, $3.50. She asked my name and wrote it down, and, unsmiling, slapped a sticker on my shoulder with my name on it, and pointed the way. I walked into this cold, dank stone church cellar. There I was. People were standing around. I did see one attractive woman and thought to myself, this is wrong of me, chauvinistic. I'm thinking only of her physical appearance, not her mind. I stood around. No one approached me. They had coffee and doughnuts. I decided I would sit down in a corner and let them come to me. No one did. Although I noticed the attractive one's eyes moved toward me a dozen times, or at least I thought so.

"I've often wondered why attractive people so studiously avoid other attractive people. On a train, if I see a pretty woman, and there's an empty seat beside her, I'll never sit there. And if a pretty woman walks into the train, and I'm sitting alone, she'll never sit down beside me. . . . Anyway, I'm sitting alone and woman wearing a black beret comes through the door. She looks like Nancy Walker, worse, and,

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just as I thought, she made a beeline right for me. Why do these types always find me? She said she found these singles nights 'valuable, very valuable experiences'''—Luther laughed—''talked away like that with complete ease and assurance. Then they got us together in groups and the leader says, 'I'm not your leader. Don't look upon me as a leader. I'm just here to get things moving. This is not group therapy. This is not psychoanalysis. This is just a rap session . . .' Then he said the topic was: Would I marry myself? And he went around the circle asking. They all said yes. I said no, I wouldn't. After I said no, some of the others also said no. So there we were, paying $3.50 to talk to other people.

''I feel . . . it's like being back where you started, when I was a young man. I know why I married my wife: she fed me, clothed me, took care of me . . . she was my blanket against the world.''

XII

Luther looks thinner and more haggard. One morning he tells me that his wife has returned from a trip to Michigan. When he saw her, he proposed that they get together again. ''She said no, she couldn't . . . that I was overpowering. She said that she was afraid of me.''

XIII

The town in which Luther lives has a large Chassidic Jewish community. ''When I walk into town I see all these arcane Jewish types . . . with their black hats and suits and long black beards . . . there's not much possibility of finding a friend.''

XIV

Luther fingers the things on his desk: a dried meat bone, a Buddha made from crushed concrete, and says, ''There was an old man who used to visit our family when I was a kid. His

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name was Harry Bard. He was a distant relative. He came by for handouts: old clothes, food, whatever my mother gave him. He had an apologetic, smiling, impotent air. I felt sorry for him.'' Luther paused. ''Now I feel like that old man—Harry Bard.''

XV

In a few days, he says, ''Something happened last night that tells me it's *fini* with my wife. . . my youngest daughter had called and asked if anything was new. I said no, and hung up. I looked around, and there was. . . I collect bottles. Green ones, turquoise, I put them in little displays. . . and I have begun to collect blue ones. I had put a little collection of blue bottles in my bedroom; including a blue vase, a small one that my wife liked. It had been in her bedroom, and I took it and put it in mine with the others. It had an association, this vase, for us, a memory of an evening, nothing sentimental, nevertheless it meant something. I know it did, because she never sold it, although she sold many things from the house in her shop. The house is piled with junk and she would just take something and sell it. But not this. But apparently yesterday, during the day when I wasn't home, she came in and took it.

''It means either of two things, and they both mean the end. One, that she just wanted to take it to the shop and sell it for materialistic reasons, even though she saw that I had placed it in my collection. The fact that she didn't feel anything about it, or consider my feelings in the matter. Or, two, that the vase does have meaning to her. She's fond of it, and wants to have it beside her. In which case she's really decided it's over between us, and wants to have things near her that she likes. That she's really moving out for good.''

XVI

Peter Black sits talking to me at my desk. He is considered a

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JFI eccentric—a man in his late sixties with frightened eyes and a scatterbrained way of talking. Luther often gives him a long blank stare and begins reading the newspaper when Peter is talking to him. Peter laughs a lot, and boasts that he has never been sick a day in his life. He was a poet in Russia; he knew Mayakovsky and Andreyev and Gorky; he takes out of his pockets crumbling yellowed pages of pamphlets published fifty years ago of Russian poetry and short stories. "The Jews are an enigma!" he says one day, his fingers pointing at me. Pleased with the phrase, he repeats it, "an enigma, yes, what they have accomplished;" his eyes have lit to the phrase, and he walks away, his shuffling walk, mumbling and smiling to himself. He likes our department best of all; he lights on us and says, his eyes twinkling, "I sense a creative force here. Yes, a creative power. Am I right?"

One afternoon we are chatting and I say, "Do you have any brothers and sisters?"

"Yes," Peter answers, "I had a brother—a doctor. He's gone. He was in Buchenwald; they burned him at Auschwitz." I see the tears falling from his eyes; he shakes them away. He chokes on the words. "Excuse me. I am not crying," and he hurries away.

In a few minutes I look for him, but he is not at his desk. My phone rings. It is Peter. "Someone came over to me and asked me why I was crying. They saw me at your desk, and they said I was crying. It's ridiculous. I wasn't crying—"

"But you shouldn't be ashamed—"

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't talk about these things. I don't know what came over me. But I wasn't crying. I explained that to this person, so it's all right now."

XVII

Now that Luther's wife seems to have walked out permanently, there are no major changes in Luther's daily routine.

He spends the evening watching TV, "talking back to the box" when he gets angry at what he is watching. His

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daughters do not call him. He says about children, "My experience has always been that kids are cannibals and killers." When a child comes into the office, Stephen's face brightens and he goes over to it. Luther calls out sarcastically across the office, "Pet her, Stephen. Go ahead and pet the little killer." He recalls saying goodbye to his uncle and getting caught on a train when it lurched away—"with three stinking kids waiting in the car for me knowing nothing."

He grows reflective about his life, thinking back to when he was single and running a pottery shop in Santa Monica with his uncle. It was his wife who insisted that they move back East.

"I was a good Jewish husband. I only did things she liked. I never went hiking because my wife Lil didn't like it. I was wrong . . . it demolishes you.

"Judy, my youngest daughter, leaves the curtains wide open at night. She likes to be shocked awake by the dawn. The way I was raised, you lower the curtains. When you piss, you piss on the rim. You don't hit the water and make noise.

"We make the small decisions, David. The big decisions are made for us. We drift in a half-lotus position, in complete unawareness. I used to have this little imp telling me how to think, how to dress, how to behave properly. He's still talking to me all the time. Now I tell the little imp to just fuck off."

XVIII

"I know I'm not supposed to say this around here, but it's the Jews who have destroyed this country."

"The Jews?"

"Hear me out. I was . . . slightly gifted as a young man. I published some poems." Luther swallows a handful of raisins and offers the box to me.

"The Jews, with their brazen arrogance, ran Hollywood. Harry Cohn, Louis B. Mayer. Every week I went to the movies and they filled us with all those romantic notions, those impossible illusions of heroism and success. They didn't prepare

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us for life—they left us completely unprepared to cope with life as it really is. I blame the Jews for they destroyed my creativity. And don't think I'm the only one, David. The Jews around here don't admit these things."

XIX

Luther was agitated all day yesterday, bristling at all of us. I learn why. He asked his wife to buy a kosher chicken for him. She did, and had cooked it for him. He invited her over to eat it with him. They ate the chicken together. Afterwards, Luther turned on the television set and settled down to watch all his favorite Channel 13 programs. About ten o'clock his wife said she thought she might as well leave.

Luther mulls this over today. "I realize now she must have expected that we would talk...about something important."

XX

Luther is haunted by his conviction that he should have been a writer.

"But you published poems when you were in your twenties. What happened then?"

Luther thinks a moment.

"My wife was...counter-productive. She loved everything I wrote. Then I saw that when she had the babies, she gave them just as effusive attention as she did my writing..." He shakes his head.

The last time he took a creative writing class, his teacher had encouraged him. This meant a great deal to him, and he had begun writing seriously. Then he had his fourth heart attack, and stopped writing.

Now Luther is taking a new writing class at the local library. He is trying to regain what he feels he has lost.

"A woman read a sex poem about her husband's cock, using the metaphor of a whale. Jesus Christ. Then a girl read

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some poems. A businessman, a member of the class, called out after she read: 'Terrific! *Terrific!* I wish more people could hear that! Let's hire a bigger hall!''

XXI

Luther hands me a poem he has written for the class:

Fear has shells
People wear them
willy-nilly
  like shirts and ties
and wide lapels...

In the poem he says that his wife's desertion has made him feel like ''discarded junk.''

XXII

Luther is the chief fire warden of our floor. There is a fire drill on Thursday, and Stephen, who is at home ill, does not attend. ''Don't forget to mark Stephen absent,'' he tells Bea.

''But he's sick, Luther,'' she says.

''You're argumentative! Mark him down. Come on, Bea! I also have a memo for you on fire exits. The situation is egregious.''

After twenty-three years, Stephen and Luther have a complicated relationship. Stephen's father was a renowned Hebrew scholar, whose only shortcoming was his inability to criticize people.

Stephen likes everything Jewish; also Tony Bennett, Ray Charles, Iris Murdoch, Howard Cosell, Anita O'Day, Ruby Dee, Frederick Manfred, Judy Collins, Margaret Drabble, Anais Nin, James Hanley, Helen Humes, Laurie Lee, Erica Jong, V.S. Pritchett, Jane Fonda and John Jacob Niles. He is a compulsive talker and a careful listener. If he does not read an entire book every day, he feels he is losing ground. He is interested in butterflies, ants and cats. He loves London; Edinburgh; Jerusalem; food; boxing; photography; baseball;

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literature above all. The author of twenty books, he understands Luther well. He does not agree with his wife Susan, who says, "There's a summer fool and a winter fool. The summer fool doesn't dress up and hide what he is. With the winter fool it takes longer to get past the beard, the moustache. . . Luther is a winter fool."

He brings little treats for Luther every day: an article, a book of interest to Luther. He worries about him, and it pains him to see Luther retreat more and more into his mysticism books. While Luther is quick to say to me, "Stephen has a hell of a lot more blemishes and hangups than you know," Stephen is always looking for Luther's good points. "Luther tells a story well, he's intelligent. . ." He pauses and thinks.

At points of tension, Luther says to Stephen, "Hold me up. I'm crumbling." Luther comes into work an hour after Stephen and leaves work an hour before Stephen does. While he is in the office, he does a fraction of what Stephen does.

Stephen reads every newspaper, every literary magazine, most popular magazines—he bounces around Brentano's every lunch hour. Stephen is highly regarded for his scholarship and good nature at JFI. But by carving out a creative life of his own, working nights and weekends, he has paid a terrible price. In his mid-fifties, he is deathly sick. Even walking in the New York air—he who loves life beyond anyone I have ever known—leaves him gasping for breath.

Stephen and Luther both read the *Times* in the morning. Stephen reads it at breakfast, and Luther reads it during work. Stephen calls out over the glass to Luther what the front page of the *Times* says. Although he already knows, Luther welcomes the chance to air his views.

Stephen gets to the obituary page ahead of Luther and sometimes calls out the important names.

"Don't be a killjoy, Stephen," says Luther.

Luther and I both look up from what we are doing. Stephen is talking to a woman fund-raiser. He is jabbing at the pages of the *Times* with a finger, turning them rapidly

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and shouting, "He's Jewish! He's Jewish! He's Jewish! She's Jewish! She's Jewish! He's Jewish! He's Jewish! She's Jewish! He's Jewish! "

The woman is nodding her head.

Luther tries to find holes in Stephen's relationship to his wife. Susan is considerably taller and much stouter than Stephen; Luther calls her "The Cossack."

"She smokes cigars. You should hear Stephen. He doesn't realize how revealing his comments are. When she bites the tip of the cigar and spits it out, Stephen says, 'She has teeth like an elephant!' When her foot was hurt and she laid it across a chair, Stephen said, 'Her foot is like a rhino!'

"The guy is terrified of his wife," Luther says, smiling. "You know, David, I have a gimlet perception of these things. It's fascinating to watch the mechanism that's at work. People simply don't recognize themselves. It's a biochemical process."

Luther sits in Stephen's cubicle talking to him. Through the glass he had heard Stephen summarize an article by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. "JUSTIFY THAT FOR ME, STEPHEN!" he had shouted across the glass, jumping up and running into the cubicle. "YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THAT FLIM FLAM WITH ME."

Luther sits on the edge of his chair, his thin, taut body squinched up, his sneakers clenched, questioning Stephen in a fury. "Moynihan is a fool!

They stopped Kennedy—why can't they stop him?"

Stephen patiently explains, and summarizes the article. "YOU'RE WAFFLING—"

Luther has bought a six-pound pillow. It arrives in the office and he shows it to all of us.

Stephen looks at it and says, "I have a twelve-pound pillow —as big as him." He points at the tallest and heftiest man in the office.

Luther zips across the office, shouting at people at random, furiously: "Do you believe him? Do you believe that? He

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always has to top me! If I've read one book, he's read ten!''

Stephen, with his patience and understanding, usually wins. But there is one area where Luther has the upper hand.

Stephen has a penchant for reason, calm and order. He is put off by scatological talk, raunchy sex, deviate behavior.

Luther begins, ''Did you see the film *The Last Detail,* Stephen?''

''I saw it. I have no interest in that—''

Luther pounces. This is his best moment. ''Are you paying attention, David? What do you mean, Stephen, *it doesn't interest you?*''

''Sailor talk, salty language, brothels—it doesn't interest me.''

''Just because it doesn't happen to interest *you*—does that mean it's not good?''

''Of course not. I'm just saying there are many other things that interest me more—''

''We don't *care* if it interests you or not, friend; it interests other people. Did it ever occur to you that what you are really saying is that it *threatens* you?''

''Possibly; I think not—''

''BUT HOW CAN YOU SAY IT DOESN'T INTEREST YOU? It's a fact, a reality.'' Luther's eyes keep darting to me for approval. ''You're a college man, David. I hope you're listening to this.''

XXIII

On New Year's Eve, Luther prepares to go home alone.

''Ever thine...forever thine...that keeps running through my mind....where do I remember that from?'' Luther muses. ''Oh yes. This winter day reminded me...a picture on the piano of herself that my mother inscribed to my father...it was in winter she gave it to him...'Ever thine...' We laughed at the Victorian sentimentality.''

He talks at random. He recalls being eighteen and a friendship with another fellow. On New Year's Eve they would go

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from table to table, talking to people. "What courage I had then!"

He says to me, "You haven't hit this season yet . . . I look at the books on my shelves and it makes me sick. I should throw them out. I built the library for my family . . . but they don't read. Not one of them is a natural reader. My first greatest pleasure was to read . . . I should unload. How can I take off to Pago Pago if I feel like it?"

Luther tucks his scarf in his coat, and takes his umbrella. At my desk on his way out, he suddenly begins reciting:

> When I was one-and-twenty
> I heard a wise man say,
> 'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
> But not your heart away;
>
> Give pearls away and rubies
> But keep your fancy free.'
> But I was one-and-twenty,
> No use to talk to me . . . .

He trails off and does not finish. "Good night, David," he says. "Have a happy."

PART THREE

I

Ben Knapp, a fund-raiser, dies suddenly at the bottom of the stairs of the subway station at Times Square. "Imagine, dainty Ben—so clean and proper, to go like that!" Luther comments.

Pressure at the office is building. It is a busy month. Stephen is running back and forth. By noon his face is chalk white; then it turns beet red. He is gasping for breath. "He is going to have another heart attack," I tell my wife.

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Luther is more crotchety every day. The three of us visit a bookstore. All the books are marked one dollar. Luther, on the watch for a bargain, finds a dirty copy that is not marked. He takes the book to the clerk. "How much is that?" The clerk looks it over and says, "It's not marked, but all the books are one dollar."

"That's not what I'm asking you!" Luther shouts. "How much is this book?"

There is a Chinese fellow in line behind him. He tries to explain to Luther that all the books are the same price. Luther turns and shouts at him: "I'm not talking to you!"

Standing in line at the bank, Luther's eye is caught by the sight of a pretty girl. As he waits for his money, he follows the girl with his eyes. As he leaves the bank, he sees that the clerk, "a young fibbity-gibbett," has given him $100 less than his check. Luther complains to the head of the bank. At the end of the day the loss is verified, and he receives his money.

He has written Molly Bethune several times, and after a long silence he receives a letter from her. Shattered, Luther hands me the letter. Addressing Luther as "Sweet Sir," she says that she cannot write him anymore: "I can only answer the first-time people . . . Here's a weird deal: you can write me —and I promise to read your letters—and more than once . . . ."

He asks me what I think of the letter. I hem and haw—he interrupts me to say, "Let's be frank. I just didn't have enough to engage her . . . I didn't have enough brain for her to pick . . . ."

Luther's oldest daughter visits him at the office for the first time in months. All of his daughters live in Manhattan, but he rarely sees them. "How are your sisters?" he asks her.

It is almost time for Stephen's vacation. I hope he will make it. Suddenly his mother-in-law dies. The person who takes it the hardest is Stephen's millionaire brother-in-law, Harry.

Harry weeps and talks on the phone to Stephen for hours.

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The tears run down Stephen's cheeks. Stephen, who was heartsick for years after the death of his own father, identifies with Harry's feelings about the loss of his mother. Stephen's wife Susan tries to remain strong for Stephen's sake, but Harry is inconsolable. He calls Stephen at the office during the day; he comes over to Stephen's house at midnight and weeps. Harry needs a minyan (ten people) for the nightly service of prayer at the synagogue in memory of his mother. When the minyan lacks one, he calls Stephen to drop everything and come across town to the synagogue. Stephen comes.

"Listen," Luther says, "the man allows himself to be taken advantage of. That's the way he is."

"He's sympathetic—" I begin.

"He's a marshmallow," says Luther.

Two weeks pass. Stephen's vacation finally arrives. Stephen is happy on the last day of work; just before he leaves he sings a song that he has heard sung by John Jacob Niles—"Matty Groves," an Elizabethan folk song. I ask him about it and he tells me all the lyrics, their derivation, and the history of the record.

He begins to sing it again as he scoots out the door.

II

Stephen has a heart attack that night.

We wait for the news. Within two days we know that Stephen will survive. Luther calls him and wants to know when he will be back at the office, whether he will be out longer than the two-week vacation. He does not receive a firm answer to his question. Luther keeps asking Stephen to speak louder over the phone.

Within a week I visit Stephen on a Sunday at the hospital. He is plugged into several machines; a jumping light records his heartbeats. A tube is stuck up his nose and held to his cheeks with adhesive tape.

Stephen is propped up, trying to make me feel at ease,

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trying to do all the talking and to comfort me, but his voice is a whisper. He has already read Sunday's *Times Book Review* section ahead of me. He summarizes Irving Howe's review of a new book by Lucy Davidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945,* giving me the high points of the review. Then he analyzes Howe's opinions.

Stephen's son, David Ben-Gurion Greenberg, comes in. Five years younger than I, David Ben-Gurion is a playwright. He is dressed in a dungaree outfit. His hair and beard are in meticulous disarray. David Ben-Gurion is as guarded as Stephen is open, and maybe, I think, he has good reason to be. Stephen's face glows at the sight of his son; it says, this is everything in the world I need.

Stephen says in a whisper, gently, "You look like a hobo."

David Ben-Gurion winces. "Why are you giving me grief about my appearance?"

"What?" Stephen says, amazed.

David Ben-Gurion squirms at having to repeat it, but he does.

Stephen's wife, who has been hovering over him, walks us out. "He worries about Luther—that Luther's whole life is his job, and that without Stephen, Luther would have to retire—he worries about you, David, but you have a life outside JFI—he worries about Bea and Jill—"

I tell her yes, he must quit, the job is killing him. I see him, and I know. I tell Luther the next morning that I have seen Stephen. I say, "He was reading—"

"Never mind all that. All I want to know is when he'll be back at his desk."

III

The secretaries want to collect money for a gift for Stephen. Luther forbids them.

"Forbids?" I say to Bea. "How can he forbid you?"

"Luther says that it's too early to get a gift, and he won't allow it. He really just doesn't want to have to give a

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dollar—''

''Well, I insist that you do collect for Stephen.''

The collection goes on. Luther is on the defensive. ''It so happens that the last time Stephen was in the hospital, I asked him if he wanted a present. He said no.''

Luther watches ruefully as the money is collected.

Abe Stern, a staff member, comes over to us and expresses shock at Stephen's illness. After he leaves, Luther comments, ''He's shocked? What do I care if he's shocked? These immature fifty-year olds looking for self-congratulations!''

IV

It is uncertain when, and if, Stephen will be able to return to work. After four weeks, Luther is climbing the wall, and so am I. He has to come in early in the morning and leave late. He has to report to the director and do most of Stephen's chores. He is very tense, and snaps at all of us. Without Stephen's blanket of good will that kept things smooth, I find myself more and more impatient with Luther's irascibility. If my eyes turn while he is talking, he shouts, ''DAVID! DAVID! YOU'RE NOT LOOKING AT ME!'' He is visibly hurt that I do not watch the TV programs he is so fond of—Stephen always made the effort of watching them so that Luther can discuss them with him. He begins to talk about a program, and checks himself and trails off, muttering, ''Oh, you don't watch TV...''

I do not accept Luther's games the way Stephen does.

Luther says that he saw a TV show about cripples.

''How was it?'' I ask.

''How was what?'' Luther snaps with a straight face. ''What are you talking about?''

Later, trying to keep things going for his sake, I make a comment. ''Some people feel squeamish about those programs.''

''Who does? The people on the program? You David? People watching the program? Get to the point!''

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I finally burst out: "Who do you think, Luther? You know damn well who I'm talking about."

Luther retreats, but he is boiling. The secretaries watch and listen.

V

Each day gets worse. Near the end of one afternoon, I see Luther sitting at Stephen's desk wearing a black skull cap. His head and shoulders are swaying and ducking forward in a parody of Jewish orthodox prayer—"dovenning." He has a crowd around him laughing. "Maybe this way I'll get a little respect!" he shouts.

VI

Murray Farber has popping frightened eyes, a freckled face, a look of perpetual pain. He is one of us—a former member of our staff—now working for the national office of JFI on the floor above us. Ever since I came to JFI, we go through the same routine every week.

He comes over to me and says: "You know Hy Bookspan?

"Yes—"

"What a hostile guy! His wife too. Such hostile vibrations. Ah, the hell with him."

"He never seemed that way to—"

"I don't know the man!" shouts Murray, throwing up his hands, stuttering, waving me off, backing up, shaking his head in denial. "I don't know him at all." Then he puts his hands in his pockets, approaches me again, and asks,

"You know Esther Kravitz?"

"A little."

"Such a name dropper. No sense of style, class intelligence —no d-d-d-dignity. Ah, the hell with her."

"Really? I thought—"

"I don't know her!" shouts Murray. "I saw her in a crowd! Yeah, I don't know her at all!"

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He is filled with disgust with his present job and associates. He has said to me of Luther: "Poor guy. And so pretentious." Murray is a veteran of the radical movement and Jewish causes. He is also a former newspaperman, writer, and radio commentator for the Yiddish station, WEVD. "Sure, I reviewed books and did interviews on WEVD. So did Melvin, and other people around here. So what? It all adds up to nothing."

When we are walking on the street, Murray suddenly stops me, grabs my arm and shouts, his finger pointing, "There goes Abie the Ape! There he goes. Look over there, David." Later he tells me that Abie is an old anarchist, and that he hadn't seen him in fifteen years. "Ah, what's the point..." he trails off.

VII

The news comes to us on one of the yellow pieces of paper that daily announce deaths of JFI staff members and their families. Murray Farber's father has died. The funeral is scheduled for that day.

"I'm not going," Luther announces. "We do these things —these so-called good deeds—just to make others think well of us and to make ourselves feel good. Therefore they aren't really worth doing. Especially in Murray's case, since his opinion of me wouldn't change anyway. I know he doesn't like me."

As the day goes on, only I and one other person on the staff, a secretary, plan to go to the funeral. Usually a dozen or more people will go. But Murray doesn't carry clout at JFI.

The tension between Luther and myself keeps building. I write a press release that doesn't follow our usual format. I don't use any of Luther's phrases, which invariably describe our guests of honor as "pillars of strength," "towers of light," "true champions of Israel," and "sources of inspiration to many." Luther grabs my release off the desk and screams, "You could get fired for a release like this! The date

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and address must be in the first line! I never saw anything like this in my life!''

''Luther, there's no need to get upset—''

''YOU MAKE ME FEEL FREAKISH!. . . WHEN *I'M* THE ONE WHO'S BEEN FIGHTING FOR INDIVIDUALITY ALL MY LIFE. . . ''

Later he says, ''There are certain things we must do, certain patterns we must follow. . . this is not a creative writing class, David.''

Luther hears Bea talking about the restaurant on the corner changing ownership and asks: ''Who runs it now?''

''The waitress is the same,'' Bea answers.

''That has nothing to do with the ethnic cuisine!'' Luther shouts.

I feel myself bristling. Luther is talking about the national JFI convention that is coming up.

''Where is it being held?'' I ask, knowing as I say it I have made a mistake.

''YOU DON'T KNOW? YOU'VE BEEN HERE ALL THIS TIME AND YOU DON'T KNOW?''

''Miami?'' I say, but it's too late.

''I MEAN DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE WORKING HERE DAVID? I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME THAT YOU WOKE UP TO YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES. I KNOW YOU DON'T LIKE TO HEAR THESE THINGS, DAVID, THEY IRRITATE YOU, BUT YOU'RE A MEMBER OF A TEAM. YOU MAY NOT LIKE IT, AND I MAY NOT LIKE IT, BUT THAT'S WHAT WE'RE BEING PAID FOR, THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT—''

''And I think, Luther, that you are a pain in the ass.''

There is silence. The secretaries have stopped their work. Luther nods his head, ''Okay.'' He does not look at me for the rest of the day.

VIII

''All right, I'll go to the funeral,'' Luther announces.

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Three of us sit in the car with Luther. We travel through the Bronx, through Luther's old neighborhood. He sees landmarks he remembers—as well as a place he doesn't recall named "Glick House." "Must have been named for me," he jokes.

We do not talk to each other.

Four funerals are being held in four chapels at the funeral home. The smoothie at the door makes sure we go into the right room.

There is Murray, and, near him, his wife. He says to me, "Who was it—which playwright—who said 'I lived my whole life in fear of death, but when it came, I wasn't prepared for it.' "

The rabbi greets Luther and asks him only one question—if Luther had known Ben Elias. Elias, a well-known figure at JFI, had committed suicide fifteen years before. He had been discovered stealing over $100,000 in JFI funds.

Before Luther can answer, the rabbi holds up his hands. "Don't tell me anything. I liked the man."

I sit beside Murray's wife, who is much taller and more solid-looking than Murray. She carries a little white paper bag. As the service is announced, she opens the paper bag and takes out little rocks and stones—"from the Jordan, the old city of Jerusalem." They are for Murray's father.

IX

When we are back in the office, Luther continues to avert his eyes from me.

Just before he leaves, he says to Jill and Bea, not to me:

"My father was in the oxygen tent in the hospital. One night I said, 'So long Pop—see you in the morning.'

"My father waved by moving the fingers of his hand.

"I just got in the car and drove home.

"When I got home, my mother said, 'It's over.' "

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X

The next day Luther does not look at me. When I come near the office, he tries to go the other way.

By the end of the day, I take a chair and sit down next to his desk.

"Look Luther, what I said—I meant it—for the moment. I felt you were being a pain in the ass. But I wouldn't want you to think I felt that way about you—about our relationship, the things we've talked about. I wanted you to know I didn't mean that."

He shakes his head. "I didn't think you were that kind of a guy."

Our eyes meet.

XI

Things have returned to normal.

Stephen is back at work. He now walks with a cane.

Luther is relieved. Before Stephen returned, he was thinking about what he would do if Stephen could not come back.

He told me of the mysterious ways the bums in Bryant Park were attracted to him, and of his fear that he would wind up like them. He frequently described his encounters with them.

On his lunch hour a big black man came up to him, bouncing a grapefruit in his hand. "Mister," he said to Luther, "this is all I got in the world; could you help me out?" Luther reached into his own pocket and said: "Here." Luther took out an orange and bounced it in his hand. "This is all I got in the world," said Luther. "Could you help me out?" The black man laughed, patted Luther on the back, said "Touché," and walked away.

Another day a black man on a bench with a liquor bottle in a paper bag called out to Luther. Luther went over to him. "May I make so bold. . . you have a face that tells me you're someone with a deep understanding." The man talked to

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Luther about the white man's arrogance and the submergence of the black man. Luther agreed completely with him and gave him a lecture of his own, saying, "You've stopped a talker, you realize..." When Luther finished, the black man, pointing to his bottle, said, "I hope you'll forgive this liquid refreshment..." Luther took a little paper bag out of his dungaree bag, took his liquor miniature out of it, tilted it back and said: "I hope you'll forgive mine..."

Luther commented about the black man's choosing him to talk with: "I can understand it. I myself wouldn't stop to talk with one of those dressed-up, flashy guys with their business talk, their clever phrases, their rush to nowhere."

Luther continues to be puzzled by me and tries to figure me out. He tends to idolize all "creative people."

"How do you feel about Jane Fonda?" he asks.

High on boredom and liquor at this job, I reply, "I'd like to slit her throat."

He looks at me. "I thought artists were kind, gentle souls. I thought they had an 'Is-ness,' a joie de vivre."

"They're not, Luther. I keep telling you."

"Yes, I see that," he says solemnly, shaking his head.

Now that Stephen is here, Luther settles back. "Really," he says, "if you can maintain a kind of panoramic overview, it's all so amusing."

He talks often now about the women he knew before he got married, and about his shyness. "I never went near another woman when I was married. Except once. In our car pool, I had seen the other guys, when they were sitting beside a young girl in the car. When she slept, they would put their arm around her. Well, one day, see, I was sitting next to this pretty girl. She falls asleep. After thinking about it for maybe ten minutes, I finally let my hand kind of drop on her shoulder—and then I even let my hand cuddle her breast. I don't know what came over me. Finally she stretched, like she was waking up, and moved away. I worried myself sick about it, about her telling my daughters, or my wife, or both. Just one time.

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"When I was twenty, I published maybe six poems in the newspaper. I got a letter in a perfumed envelope. From a writer. Her name was Magna Wand. Well, we exchanged a few letters, and then we arranged to meet in a hotel lobby. She would wear a broad-brimmed hat and I would wear a white flower in my lapel. First I saw an 85-year old woman and I thought I better get out of there. Going through the revolving hotel door to leave, I got stuck; there, on the other side, also stuck, she was. She was about 35. We walked around the city. Finally we went up to her room. She had a big bottle of red wine. I got out of there as fast as I could. Maybe the wine didn't mean anything, but I thought it did.

"And in a similar way, I got together with Lil. You know, I knew Lil from way back. She was always the prettiest girl in school, and I had a crush on her since I was fifteen. Well, another girl wrote me about my poems in the newspaper. This one lived in New York, but wrote and said she was coming to Toronto. She asked me to rent a room for her." He pauses. "We rendezvooed. Well, she had hair on her chest. I have always been one quick to find an excuse not to fuck a woman. I got out of there and that's how I called Lil for a date and began courting her. I remember telling her, 'Do you know, Lil, I've been wasting my time with a girl with hair on her chest when I could have been with you?' "

XII

Luther came in on a Friday morning with a sunny face. "I planted a social seed today...with this woman, Yolanda, who teaches a yoga class. I mentioned bird-watching to her ...and her eyes lit up!"

On Monday morning, he was still excited, but for a different reason. "I went to Yolanda's house yesterday morning. I came into the kitchen. Yolanda wasn't there, and the door was open. There was a woman leaning against the edge of the table in pajamas and kimono...she had a luminiscence of skin...a glow...and a tight little smile. It was

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Yolanda's mother. We went outside and sat on a couch of leaves in a grove. Then some stinking little kids started throwing stones at us, and we had to get up. What knowledge this woman has. . .she lives on a hilltop. . .and I went there later in the day to spend more time with her. She has a bad back. She too believes in Yoga, yet she said it was caused by the will of God!'' Luther smiled and shook his head in admiration.

He seems to have adjusted to his new life. He does not really form any serious relationships with women. As he has often said about sex: ''That's out of my league.'' He grows increasingly forgetful and absentminded. He continues to watch TV, and writes letters of protest—to Barbara Walters: ''She has a speech defect that I find offensive in a woman who's a phony''; and to *Time Magazine* for their bicentennial issue: ''Dear Sirs: I just wasted a dollar. May I proffer the observation that nothing could be more offensive than turning the first page and finding an ad for Marlboro country—not even especially written for this occasion.'' After dictating the letter to Bea, Luther offers to sell the magazine to her for fifty cents.

The starlings continue to seek protection under the eaves of Luther's house.

Luther has new stories to tell as relatives and friends briefly cross his life. Aunt Ida and Uncle Igor invite him over for an occasional evening in Manhattan.

''My mother wasn't on a straight line, I know, but Ida takes the cake,'' he tells us. ''Aunt Ida visited the bank last week. She sat down at the bank manager's desk, leaned on her cane and said, 'I have $25,000 to deposit in your bank. You may think this odd—but this neighborhood has changed so much in recent years, the kind of people who are handling money. You don't *know* what the person who handled the money just before you was doing with himself. Sir, I want clean new bills.' '' She writes letters of complaint to the presidents of companies and the responses, Luther says, come back ''with crests on the letterheads.'' She complains to the

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president of a tea company that the tea is dyed because it darkens immediately, and to a bank president about the procedure of giving away "cheap merchandise" to lure customers. "Of course," Luther says laughing, "the bank president writes back that he understands Ida's concern—'but we were the last to succumb—and you wouldn't want us not to be able to compete freely?' "

Luther is still reading his texts on Eastern religion as well as *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson and Houston Smith's *The Religions of Man.* He goes to the Yoga gatherings, although the younger members "look at me like Methusaleh."

He sees Lil occasionally. She asks him: "How can you be so insecure and have such an enormous ego at the same time?"

He recalls his wedding day. He went into the boss' office on a Thursday, and asked for the next day off. He said he was shaking. The boss said that in view of the wedding, Luther would be permitted to leave at 4 p.m. on Friday.

"Were you that afraid?" I ask him.

"I was full of fear."

He continues to save his money. At a JFI affair at the Plaza, at the conclusion on his way out, he reaches over to the hood of the piano, lifts it up, and takes his coat out.

He thinks and rethinks his life. "You know," he says, "I don't just wash my face; I *attack* it. My first heart attack occurred when I was washing; I scrunch up my face and smack it. One day my wife Lil looked at me and said: 'Just what in the world are you doing to yourself?' I've thought this over and analyzed it. It relates to my childhood—I'm acting out the role of myself as a child who hated to be washed by my parents, and the role of my parents who are vigorously washing me."

But more than anything else, Luther thinks about Lil.

Stephen tells me that what hurts Luther most is that Lil doesn't even have a boy friend. "At least that would be a plausible reason for leaving him," Stephen explains. "But to leave him to live in a furnished room all by herself—that to her even such a life is better than living with Luther—that

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hurts him most of all.''

Luther tells me one day with a look that is full of pain that his wife, who knew he was dating Yolanda, told him that Yolanda was a ''man-junkie.'' He asked her if that was a phrase of the ''Sisterhood,'' and his wife said it was. ''The implication,'' he says to me, is that ''one, Yolanda is just hung up on men, so that it could be any man she was dating, not just me, and two, that men are a nasty addiction.''

XV

Luther wants to find out above all why he did not become a writer.

He remembers the six poems he published when he was twenty or twenty-one, and the circle of young friends who regarded him as a ''poet philosopher'' who would make his mark in the world.

He recalls the pottery shop he ran with his uncle in California, and that he was happy then.

He draws a blank about what happened then to make him stop writing.

At twenty-one, Luther courted and married Lil. ''I didn't want to marry her,'' Luther says, ''but I loved her—I always loved her from the first day I laid eyes on her—and she wouldn't agree to anything but marriage. And she had to have kids.

''And it was Lil who didn't like California and the pottery shop. It wasn't a realistic way to make a living, she thought. Yes, she made me give that up and go back East with her to New York. She insisted I take the job with JFI. She said she was sure I could do it.

''She had that faith in me.''

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Kenneth King

WORD RAID

(tongue twisters, etc. for e.e. cummings)

THE CHEAP SHEIKH AND THE CHIC SHAH SEEK TO SPEAK AT A SECRET SPA.

((THE CHEAP SHEIKH AND CHIC SHAH SEEK TO CHEEK TO CHEEK AT A SECRET SPA...))

THE SEQUESTERED QUEST FOR THE MAD, MOD, MARRED, M-A-U-V-E MARKED KEY AND THE QUEEZY MARQUIS' QUIRKY QUEER KEE WEE QUICKLY QUICKENED QUILTED QUIPS AND QUESTIONS, QUELLING QUERULOUSNESS QUITE Q-U-A-R-A-N-T-I-N-E...

THE SHEIKH'S SLEAZY SNEAK SWEEP IN SLUSH AND SLEET OF THE SHINY SLEEK SLEEPING SHEEP IS THE SPICY SPEAK OF SHEET STREET.

THEY SCOURED THE ROOT OF THE SCREWY SOUP OR CHOP SUEY SLEUTH FOR THE ROOST, ROUTE OR

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SCOUP OF THE RUDE ROTTEN RUSE BEHIND A FOOT-LOOSE ROOSTER AS THE LUCKY LONG LOST LOOT OR LOOPE TO SCORE OR SPRUCE UP THE TROUBLED TRUCE BEFORE THE SNEAKY SNOOPING TROOPS STOOP TO SHOOT OR SCATTER-SCOOP THEIR STREWN SKEWERED COUPS...

THE SHADY SHODDY SUPER SURE SHOTS AND SHALLOW SNIDE SNEAKING SNOTS AND SCHEMING SLIPPERY SCHLOCKS SELLING (SHELLING) STOLEN SLOT STOCKS TO THE SHAH'S QUEEZY SWEAT SHOPS SWOOP AND SWAP SLEEPY SWABS SHAKING SHAPELESS SLOBS SCOUTING SURE AND SAAVY SECRET S-A-B-O-T-A-G-E...

THE WORLD'S A DRAMA OF A TEENY TOT'S CAREENING TEETERTOTTER UNTETHERING A SCREAMING GLOBAL TROT AND A ZESTY BUT TESTY TEETHING TRAUMA.

(1) A TRIPPY TRIPE TRAIPSED IN ON A TRAY AND A TEETERING TEE PEE IN TAIPAI ARE TYPICAL OF THE TYPES OF T-I-P-S TRADED ON TV.

(2) A TRIPPY TIPSY TRIPE IN A TREE-RIPE TROVE TRECKED IN ON A TRAY AND TRAIPSED TO A TEETERING TEE PEE IN TROPICAL TAIPAI ARE TOO T O O TYPICAL OF THE TYPES OF TRIPS TRAITORED (TRADED) ON TV.

A GRUESOME TWOSOME WITH SPRUCED BUT TATTERED BOOTS AND A TACKY TROUPE FROM HOUSTON TRECKED THEIR TRUE-SOW* SHOW TO TUSON TO TRY THEIR TRADE OR TRUCE ON.

*(i.e. trousseau)

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word raid : preview-premier
alliterative mouth (t)RAPS
((mouth tRAPS; R-A-P-S for mousetraps)
OR: EXCLAMATIONS IN LIMBO
COLLOQUIALISMS IN AMBUSH
dance: body twisters (torque)
text: tongue twisters (talk)
TORQUE AND TALK
(''IT WAS ALL I COULD DO TO NOT DO
THE 23 SKIDDO!'')

Have you been noticing the newscasters?
They're stuttering, messing up in revealing
or interesting ways. Like the newscasters,
I find myself tongue-tied more and more.
I've also decided not to be bothered by
it; after all, it can happen to anyone.

Have you ever tried to write a tongue twister?
At first it seems almost impossible.

I found ten measly tongue-twisters in the
BOOK OF LISTS, and decided to try my hand
at it.

(Tongue twisters are concentrated, alliterative
chain clusters of easily garbled, usually
nonsensical structures whimsically mindboggling
to the point of suggesting a kind of twilight
zone where riddle, pun, aphorism and anagram
meet and trade their secret mirrored i-n-t-e-g-e-
r-s . . .)

Have you ever tried to write a tongue twister?
At first you think it's almost impossible.

WORD RAID : for e.e. cummings

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Try saying these over and over and as fast as possible!
(P.S. If these don't scramble your brains, nothing will!--)

A SPIFFLY CLIPPED, HIP AND STRICTLY TIGHT-LIPPED CRYPTIC SCRIPT IS SIMPLY SIFTED AND SIPPED THEN ON A TIMELY TIP SLIPPED ON A SECRET SHIP ADRIFT A THRIFTY TRADE TRIP, THEN SWIFTLY STRIPPED AFTER A STIFF SHIFTY RIFT BY TWO TONGUE-TIED TIFFED AND MIFFED TWIN KNIT-T'WITS!

A TORMENTED MENTOR MADLY TORN BETWEEN THE SCENTED RENT, THE RENTED SCENT THE C-E-N-T-E-R (sender) AND THE SCENTED CENTAUR WHO SENT HER SAYS IT S T I L L MAKES A DENT IN DO OR DIE...

THE S I F T AND SLOW DRIFT OF THE COLD POLAR FLOWS SHOWS THE SWIFTLY SHIFTING SCRIPT OF THE STRIP OF COAL SHOALS SURROUNDING THE POLES' HOLES HOLDS THE KNOLL OF THE DROLL TROLL'S TOLL.

SCORES OF SHEER SHORN SCOURGED AND SCORCHED SEA SHORES ARE AN UNSOUGHT SORT OF SORE OR SOUR SWAPPED SHOT OR SUPER STOCKED SCHLOCK SHOCK—A SHAM STARE STALKING A SCAM SCARE?

XERXES ZERO-DEGREE XEROX ZIPS, ZIG-ZAGS AND Z-O-O-M-S ZEALOUSLY THROUGH ZENOBIA WHILE ZENO'S ZEFTY JESTING ZAFTIC ZEBRA AND XYLOPHONE ARE Z-A-P-P-I-N-G ZENophobia.

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A FLAKEY FLEET OF FLAT FOOTED FRUMPY FUNKY FREAKY FLUNKIES FRAZZLE A FRANKLY BEDAZZLED FRONT LINE RANK OF REGULARLY WRANGLED RANKLED FRANTIC YANKS FRAYED AND FLAYED BY THE FLASHY FLESH AND FLEECY FLANKS OF FORTUNE.

A RATTLED BALLET AND A BATTY, BATTERED RAFFLED BALLOT BROKE THE BLOODY RABBLE'S BALLAD INTO A FRANTIC, FRAZZLED RAZZLE-DAZZLE BLITZ AND BATTLE.

GIVE HER

GIVE HER A GRIMMER GRAMMAR RATHER THAN A SLIMMER GLIMMER OF GLAMOUR.

(GIVE HER A GRIMMER G-L-I-B-B-E-R GRAMMAR RATHER THAN A SLIMMER GLIMMER OF GLAMOUR.)

NEFERTITI'S NEAT NEW ESOTERIC EDEN EATERY ETCHED IN KITCHY KINKY GRAPHIC GRAFFITI EAST OF THE GREAT GREEK CREEK IN TROPICAL TAHITI BY THE GLEAMING GREEN TEA SEA WITH SCREAMING SLEEK SCENERY GREETS THE BLEARY, WEAK AND WEARY WITH A WAFER AND A TREATY.

THE CLIQUEY CHIC BLEAKLY STREAKED FREAK BOUTIQUE SELLING PETE'S STEEP SLEEK HOME-MADE PETITE PEAK PEKOE TEA TEAK REAL CHEAP IN CHEEKY MOZAMBIQUE SPEAKS TO THE WEAK TWEAKED BEAK OF A SNEEZING SNEAKY SQUEAKING S-T-R-E-A-K-I-N-G GREEK'S MEEKLY REEKING OBLIQUE COMIQUE. . .

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THE KOO-KOO CUCKOO'S SLEW OF CHEWED STEWED SKY BLUE SKEWERED HIGH CLUES ON THE RUDE OVERDUE RU(S)E OF 'WHY I DO HAIKU ON TOP OF A CHO-CHO' INSTEAD OF IN (AN) IGLOO HYPES (THE) HIDE IN I DO INTO (A) WRY WIRED EYE GLUE.

LOLITA'S LECHEROUS LITTLE PEEPING PECKER PEEKERS PIQUED AND POOPED WITH PUNK, POP AND PUNS POKES THE POST OR PAST PASSED POOR PORT PEORIA'S ORAL ARIA.

NIMBLY NIBBLING AND NUMBLY NODDING THEN PLODDING, HOPPING, COPPING AND HOB-KNOBBING WITH EGG NOG THE SLIP-SHOD CLOD CODDLED CLOBBERED AND CLOGGED THE CON OR COD IN GARBO'S CARGO'S COCKLED COBBLED GARDEN'S GARBLED CARBON COG JOB, FLOGGING A BOTTLED GLOB OR BOGGLED GARGOYLED BLOB IN BROWN BOONDOGGLE JOGGING GOGGLED GARB.

A BLIMY BLIMSY BANKER WITH A BLACKENED BACK-GAMMON BISTRO BUNGLED A BURLY BAKER'S BACKER AND A BRACKETED BLACKGLAMMA BIMBO.

(1) THE SHOCKING STOCK SPOT OF THE STARVING STARK SHARK'S SPARTAN START SPARKED A SPEEDY STORK'S RETORT, A SPORT JUST SORT OF SHORT OF SHORING SORTING AND SNORTING SUPPORT.
(2(THE STORK'S SUPPORT OF TWISTING TORQUE IS A SHOCKING SPORT SPARKED BY SPOTTING THE STARK SPARTAN SHARK'S SELFSAME START (-SORT OF...THE SORT THAT SNORES IN PORT...S-C-O-R-E-S IN COURT...)

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A SEXY SUPPLE SWINGING COUPLE'S SLINKY SINGING STRUT, SHOVE, STUFF AND SHUFFLE CAPPED THEIR NAUGHTY BUT SUBTLE GRIND OF SMUTTY NUTTY SNUFF AND UPPERS BUMPTUOUSLY SUMPTUOUS NUPTUAL SUPPER.

SHIVA'S SHINY SHUNTED SHEAVES ACHIEVE THE DARING DAIRY DEED OF CLEAVING TO THE CHEEZY SHREDDED CHEATING SLEEVES OF SLEAZY SEETHING THEIVES FROM THEBES.

SELECTIVELY KEPT, S-U-S-P-E-C-T, AND ANTICSEPTICALLY SWEPT WITH SHINY SEARING SALTY SWEAT WHILE SECRETLY CRAVING CRUETS AND CREPES SARA AND CLARA SLEPT IN THE SAHARA THEN ADEPTLY CREPT SCEPTICALLY SCHLEPPING SHEP'S SCHWEPPS UP STEEP STEELY STONY STEPPES.

THE BRUTELY BRASH SPLASHY BRANDY BASH BACK BY THE BLOOMING BRUSH OF THE BLACK BLUSHING BERRY BUSH BRUISED THEN SOOTHES THE BURNT BUNS AND BOOT SOOT ON THE (TRUTH: FORESOOTH!) SMOOTHE SUPER SLEUTH'S BARED BLUE SUIT.

A GAGGED AND BADGERED, RAGGED BLACKGUARD BAGGED AND DAGGERED A BRAZEN BRAGGARD, SWOONED, SAGGED AND STAGGERED JAGGARDLY THEN SWAGGERED HAGGARDLY NAGGING A LAZY STRAGGLED LAGGARD.

ASIDE FROM THE ((S-I-G-H)) (SIGN) C Y C I N I D E IN THE NIGHT SIDE OF THE SHY SIREN'S SLY SNIDE STRIDE SIRING AND SQUIRING HER IRE ASTRIDE THE WILD IDLE SIDLED SLIDE DOWN THE WIDE WIRE IRISH TIDE OF UNTYING THE UNTRIED (TITLED) IDOL SIDE OF THE PSYCHE'S IRON IKON IDE (E-Y-E-D).

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CLOE'S CLOSE CRUSHED CLOTH CLOCHE CLOAK OR CLONE (CLOWN?) CRONE CROWN COAT GROWS (GROANS), GLOWS, GLOATS LIKE A SLOW CROW'S LAZY SHOWY FLOAT...

(1) A TWISTED SISTER IN TITTERS ASSISTED BY TOUGH TONGUE TWISTERS WHISPERS TO THE SICK SITTER A SLICK PSYCHO SIZZLER WITH A TWITTER IN HER SIGH (IN VERSAILLES)...

(2) (IN VERSAILLES) AT A WILD & WICKED TRYST A THICK-WRISTED TWISTED SISTER ADDICTED TO GLITZ AND GLITTER WITH WHISPY SWISHY WHISKERS WEARING WACKY KNAPPY WICKED LI-QUEURED WICKERED KNICKERS IS THROWN INTO A TAWDRY TIZZY OF TITTERS BY A TOUGH THORNY TONGUE TWISTER AS SHE WHISPERS TO A SICK SITTER A STICKY SLICK PSYCHO SIZZLER WITH A SLYLY WRY, SPRITELY WITTY TWITTER IN HER SLIGHT SIGH (IN VERSAILLES)...

A SPECTRAL SPARTAN SPATE OF LATE NITE EIGHTY-EIGHTS SCREAM AND CAREEN DOWN SLIGHT SIGHTED SLIDING STREET SCENES SHOWING THE SHEER SHINING STREAMING STEAMY SEAMS OF LIQUID LIGHT-LINED D-R-E-A-M-S...

A TITAN?
A TITAN IS NOT A T-R-I-T-O-N* BUT A TYPE OF WRITIN' WITH TIGHT T-W-A-N-G-Y LIGHTNIN'!

*a type of missle

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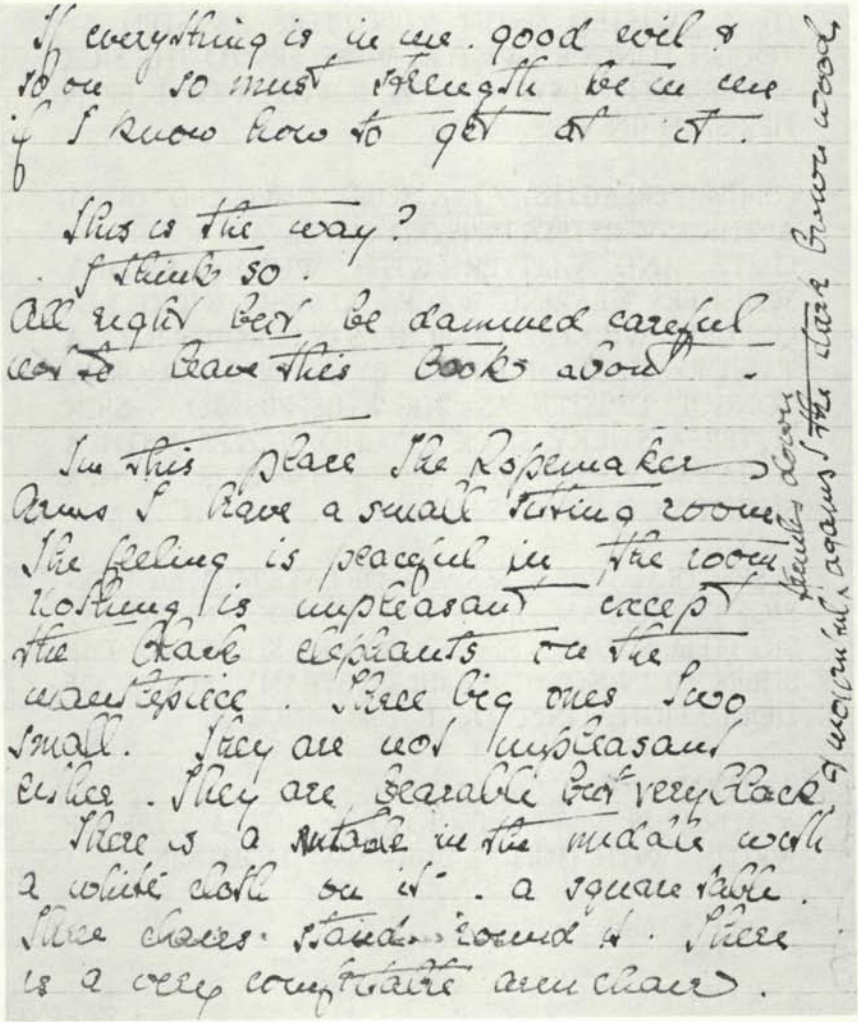

If everything is in me. good evil &
so on so must strength be in me
if I know how to get at it.

Is this the way?
I think so.
All right but be damned careful
not to tear this book apart.

In this place the ropemaker
owns I have a small sitting room.
The feeling is peaceful in the room
Nothing is unpleasant except
the black elephants on the
mantelpiece. Three big ones two
small. They are not unpleasant
either. They are bearable but very black.
There is a picture in the middle with
a white cloth on it. a square table.
Three chairs round it. There
is a deep comfortable arm chair.

A manuscript page from Smile Please, *an unfinished autobiography by Jean Rhys.*

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Elizabeth Vreeland

Jean Rhys

The Art of Fiction LXIV

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica, in the Windward Islands, in 1894, of a Welsh doctor and a native-born Creole. She was sixteen when she was sent to school in England. Her first stories, The Left Bank, *were published in 1927. Four novels in the twelve years before World War II (*Quartet, After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, Good Morning, Midnight, *and* Voyage in the Dark*) established a fragile literary reputation which eroded when she dropped out of the publishing world for thirty years only to emerge from her retreat in the west of England when the BBC did a radio adaptation of her novel,* Good Morning, Midnight. *The obscurity had been such that in October, 1956, the* New Statesman *carried an advertise-*

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ment to find her: "Would Jean Rhys or anyone who knows her whereabouts please get in touch with Sasha Moorsom, Features Department, BBC, in connection with future Third Programme broadcast of "Good Morning, Midnight." The renaissance of Jean Rhys brought with it the publication of two collections of short stories, Tigers are Better Looking, Sleep It Off, Lady, *and her most famous novel,* The Wide Sargasso Sea, *an invented biography of Bertha, the mad wife in Charlotte Bronte's* Jane Eyre.

She has been married three times—first, after World War I, to a Dutch chansonnier *who wrote songs and sang them is such Paris spots as Le Lapin Agile. He deserted her after ten years of travelling about Europe, mostly to Vienna and Paris, and she divorced him. Her second husband, an editor at the publishing firm of Hamish Hamilton, died at the end of the last war. Her third husband, a retired naval officer, died just after the couple moved to the small cottage in Devon where she now lives.*

The chief character in almost all her work is a woman who seems to follow in her creator's path step by step: from a West Indian childhood, through the ordeal of life in the provincial theater in pre-World War I England, to an elderly solitude in the English countryside.

Miss Rhys's eyes are sapphire, wide-set, and long-lashed against a pale English skin; one cannot help thinking that had she stayed in Dominica she would not have that skin, even with the daily hour and a half-attention she says she gives to her face and make-up. She was wearing a white silk blouse hidden by an opalescent pink lamé jacket, made to seem somewhat coquettish with ribbons and puffed sleeves.

On the table stood a vase of huge yellow purple-hued cabbage roses, so voluptuous that they looked artificial, as if made of silk for an Edwardian hat.

Outside, the sun sparkled on the giant hedgerows which seclude Jean Rhys's cottage from a quiet Devon village. Here, she has continued at her writer's work, insisting on privacy which secluded her even from her fellow-villagers.

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RHYS

We moved here because I wanted a place of my own. We bought it—my late husband and I—sight unseen because anything was better than rooms. That's all we'd been in. A room is, after all, a place where you hide from the wolves. That's all any room is. It was difficult here at first. The gales came through the crevices. The mice were everywhere. A frog in the bathroom. Then when I first came here, I was accused of being a witch. A neighbor told the whole village that I practised black magic. I got very cross, but gradually it all died down.

INTERVIEWER

What a shock it must have been when you first arrived from the West Indies.

RHYS

Of course, I hated the cold. England was terribly cold when I first came there. There was no central heating. There were fires, but they were always blocked by people trying to get warm. And I'd never get into the sacred circle. I was always outside, shivering. They had told me when I left Dominica that I would not feel the cold for the first year—that my blood would still be warm from the tropic sun. Quite wrong!

INTERVIEWER

Where did you go to school?

RHYS

It was at Cambridge, the town, not the University. The east wind comes right across from . . . Russia, I suppose. I used to lie in bed and shiver and shiver, wondering why I'd ever dream of wanting to see daffodils and snowflakes. Then the maid would bring me this hot water bottle. It was very sweet of her. Oh, I found England bitterly cold.

INTERVIEWER

And the people?

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RHYS

I didn't find them terribly warm. I was so unhappy in England. I was delighted to get away.

INTERVIEWER

Where did you go after Cambridge?

RHYS

I left school early because I wanted to become an actress. While I was studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, my father died in the West Indies. My mother wrote me that she couldn't afford to keep me at school. But I didn't want to go back to Dominica. I knew I'd miss my father too much. So I joined the chorus of a show on tour around England.

INTERVIEWER

How did your family in Dominica react?

RHYS

There wasn't much they could do about it. Anyway I believe in fate.

INTERVIEWER

But you could have gone back. You did have the choice.

RHYS

I suppose so. But I wanted to be an actress. I was a very bad actress, but that's what I wanted to be. I do believe that life's all laid out for one. One's choices don't matter much. It is really a matter of being adapted. If you can adapt, you're all right. But it's not always easy if you're born not-adapted, a bit of a rebel; then it's difficult to force yourself to adapt. One is born either to go with or to go against.

INTERVIEWER

In your first written but not your first published novel,

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Voyage in the Dark, the heroine is also born in the Antilles. She becomes a chorus girl who travels about the dreary towns of the English provinces, is deflowered by a rich Englishman who cares for her, who then abandons her. Did you write it as a form of purgation?

RHYS

I wrote it because it relieved me. I never wrote for money at the start. I wrote the makings of *Voyage in the Dark* long, long ago. I wrote it in several exercise books and then I put it away for years. Someone described the result as "unpublishably sordid but with great sensitiveness and persuasiveness" —so I went on to other things. Then, twenty years later, fate had it that I tackle it again. I hadn't really written a book; it was more or less a jumble of facts. From the notes I'd done ages before I managed to put together *Voyage in the Dark.*

INTERVIEWER

And is it still your favorite?

RHYS

I suppose so. Because it came easiest.

INTERVIEWER

The contrast of the sunny Caribbean landscape with the bleak English one is very moving in *Voyage in the Dark.* Mango trees; hammocks; mauve shadows; purple sea, and the fight not to have a dark patch under your arms while putting on your gloves. . . the business of being a lady. One gets brilliant flashes of what it must have been like.

RHYS

It's all a bit romanticised. Now I'm trying to do it again as it really was. For my memoirs. I hope I've succeeded. It may be a bit dull, perhaps.

INTERVIEWER

But the colors weren't romanticised, and the smells. . .

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RHYS

No, it's a very beautiful place, Dominica, and that wasn't romanticised. The mountains are lovely; but it hasn't got any nice beaches, none of those lovely white beaches the tourists love. It's a volcanic island. . . the beaches are black.

INTERVIEWER

What did you do all those years when you weren't writing?

RHYS

When I was excited about life, I didn't want to write at all. I've never written when I was happy. I didn't want to. But I've never had a long period of being happy. Do you think anyone has? I think you can be peaceful for a long time. When I think about it, if I had to choose, I'd rather be happy than write. You see, there's very little invention in my books. What came first with most of them was the wish to get rid of this awful sadness that weighed me down. I found when I was a child that if I could put the hurt into words, it would go. It leaves a sort of melancholy behind and then it goes. I think it was Somerset Maugham who said that if you "write out" a thing. . . it doesn't trouble you so much. You may be left with a vague melancholy, but at least it's not misery—I suppose it's like a Catholic going to confession, or like psychoanalysis.

INTERVIEWER

Did you keep a journal?

RHYS

Not exactly. I wrote things down. Not each day. More in spurts. I would write to forget, to get rid of sad moments. Once they were written down, they were gone.

INTERVIEWER

Is it always a sadness for you to write?

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RHYS

No. Writing can also be very exciting. When you're really in the mood to write, you write without apparently wanting to. But it doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes it's a struggle, and it's very tiring.

INTERVIEWER

What is the story of the publication of *The Left Bank*?

RHYS

It's an odd story. My first husband was a poet, half-French half-Dutch. He had been on the Disarmament Commission in Vienna after the first World War. There were two Japanese officers in the Allied Commission. But one was supposed to speak French and couldn't, and the other was supposed to speak English and couldn't. So they both got secretaries who were in fact interpreters and translators, and that was the job my husband got, to the one who was supposed to speak English, Mr. Miyaki. Someone in his office became interested in my writing and showed my stories to Ford Madox Ford. Ford cared terribly about writers. If he thought anyone had any good in him at all, he'd go to any lengths to help, pulling every string he could to help. He did that for any amount of people. He really got D.H. Lawrence started, and a lot of the writers who are not so well known.

INTERVIEWER

In his introduction to *The Left Bank,* Ford praised your "singular instinct for form," which he says is "possessed by singularly few English writers and almost no English women writers."

RHYS

The things you remember have no form. When you write about them, you have to give them a beginning, a middle, and an end. To give life shape—that is what a writer does. That is what is so difficult.

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INTERVIEWER

Were there others beside Ford who helped you as you started to write?

RHYS

The whole atmosphere of Paris helped, and I learned to read French pretty well. All that no doubt had an influence on me. But Ford helped me more than anybody else: "Do this!" "Don't do that!" He insisted on my reading French books and I think they helped me a lot. They had clarity. Ford always said that if you weren't sure of a passage to translate it into another language. If it looked utterly silly, one got rid of it. English can be so imprecise. Ford published several of my stories in the *Transatlantic Review,* and he helped me with money. He really helped. It was he who found the publisher for *The Left Bank:* After that there was a quarrel and I never saw him again. He went to America to live.

INTERVIEWER

Hemingway takes a lot of swipes at him in *A Moveable Feast.*

RHYS

I think it's a spiteful book. He bullies everybody. Ford wasn't at all the way Hemingway described him.

INTERVIEWER

Then he wasn't pretentious and snobbish and evil-smelling. . . ?

RHYS

Not at all. And back then Hemingway wasn't catty. He always seemed to me as if he were enjoying himself terribly. He was a very nice-looking young man. But in that book, he was disparaging about everybody—Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, everybody. I didn't like it at all.

INTERVIEWER

An actress recently asked to play Marya in a film version of

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Quartet hesitated because she said she found it dated—dated in that today Marya would have some other option than having to live *à trois* with the Heidlers. She could take a job. . . .

RHYS

In those days, if you were English, or supposed to be English, and you were in Paris and didn't know French well, it was pretty well impossible. I mean what job could you get? One of the things the Heidlers tell Marya when she goes there is that they'll find her a job. "Come stay with us for a little bit. Sooner or later we'll pull a string and find you a job." That was how they convinced her. In England you could get some sort of job, but in Paris it wasn't so easy. You might get a job as a mannequin, or in a shop, but then you wouldn't know the prices, or anything. Of course, it did all happen in the twenties.

INTERVIEWER

It happens today. Three people in a trap.

RHYS

Yes, much the same sort of thing, perhaps, slightly changed. I think, that as usual, people will do what they have to do. That's where fate comes in.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you leave Paris finally and settle back in England?

RHYS

I was told "You must go to London to sell *Quartet.*" I didn't want to particularly, but everyone said I must; so in the end I did. I went right to London, then back to Paris for a short time to write *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie,* and then I came back to England, remarried and stayed.

INTERVIEWER

In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie,* Julia Martin finds herself alone and broke in Paris in such an apathy that she can only

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lie in bed, allowing her decisions to be made by chance: "If a taxi hoots before I count to three, I'll go to London, if not, I won't."

RHYS

Don't you think that by the time she arrived at that stage, she was rather tired? I mean you can get very tired. And then it is rather a temptation to just lie down and see what happens.

INTERVIEWER

And pull the covers over your head.

RHYS

That's right. I did that as a child. I was so afraid of cockroaches and centipedes and spiders.

INTERVIEWER

They're so large in the Indies.

RHYS

But that was nothing like my fear of *obeah*. That's West Indian black magic. I remember we had this *obeah* woman as a cook once. She was rather a gaudy kind of woman, very tall and thin and always wore a red handkerchief on her wrist. She once told my fortune and a lot of it has come true. My life was peopled with fears. I think that's one of the reasons I don't go back. Maybe my big reason.

INTERVIEWER

But you wrote a wonderful story about going back to your convent school there after twenty-five years.

RHYS

I did go back once. For a very short time. But all my nuns had gone. Everything's very changed. I'm trying to do an autobiography now and I find it very difficult to remember when I was a child in the West Indies.

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INTERVIEWER

You wrote that you have such a great memory. . . that you can shut your eyes and remember conversations. . .

RHYS

That's what I've tried to do, but it's a very long time ago now.

INTERVIEWER

You write in *Quartet* that when you tell lies people think it's a *cri de coeur,* and then when you tell the truth, nobody believes you.

RHYS

That's always so. I've noticed that. They believe the lies far more than they believe the truth.

INTERVIEWER

Then you really haven't a problem of veracity with your childhood in the book.

RHYS

If I had a problem I doubt that anybody would contradict me. I don't think anybody's alive to contradict me. I try to be more or less truthful, though I suppose the whole thing's a bit romanticized.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote in *Voyage in the Dark* that the fantastic is what you don't do, and the real is what you do.

RHYS

I suppose the fantastic is what you imagine, but as soon as you do a fantastic thing, it's no longer fantastic, it becomes real.

INTERVIEWER

And the difference between romance and reality?

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RHYS

Reality is what I remember. You can push onto reality what you feel. Just as I felt that I disliked England so much. It was my feeling which made me dislike it. Now I make a lot of the nice part of the Indies, and I've sort of more or less forgotten the other part, like going to the dentist who only came to the island every now and again. I'm trying to write the beauty of it and how I saw it. And how I did see it as a child. That's what I've been toiling at. It's such a battle. I can't waste much more time on it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you written of your relations with the black people in Dominica?

RHYS

That's very complicated because at the start I hated my nurse. A horrid woman. It was she who told me awful stories of zombies and *sucriants,* the vampires; she frightened me totally. I was a bit wary of the black people. I've tried to write about how I gradually became even a bit envious. They were so strong. They could walk great distances, it seemed to me, without getting tired, and carry those heavy loads on their heads. They went to the dances every night. They wore turbans. They had lovely dresses with a belt to tuck the trains through that were lined with paper and rustled when they moved. Then, my chief worry was that I was expected to get married. I thought, my God, what will I do? At first I doubted that I'd ever get a proposal. Then I knew I was *bound* to marry, otherwise I'd be an old maid which would be perfectly awful. That worry made one very self-conscious. But the black people didn't worry a hoot about that. They had swarms of children and no marriages. I did envy them that.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have young friends who were black?

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RHYS

No, it was more divided then. There were a lot of colored girls at the convent I went to. I didn't always like them—but I was kind of used to them.

INTERVIEWER

Was the incident real in *The Wide Sargasso Sea* when you go swimming in a pool in the woods with the black girl, Tia?

RHYS

That might have happened. But the girl never stole my dress as we bathed. That was fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Although you are one of five children, one gets the feeling you had a lonely childhood.

RHYS

Yes, I never saw much of them. They left early and came to England. One brother went to India and spent his life there. I didn't see him at all. The other wandered about rather. He went to Canada and Australia and East Africa, then he went back to the West Indies. In Australia he got married, came to London, fell down the stairs and died. I don't think he was drunk or anything. My other brother said, "Just like Orin, he would die in a melodramatic way."

INTERVIEWER

You say your motto is "not harrowing." What does this phrase mean for you?

RHYS

Don't surprise or amaze or make me angry, or make me sorry about something. Lots of words that used to be quite common one doesn't hear any more. It's sad about words which meant quite a lot. I mean a word like "splendid." Nobody says a thing is "splendid." You never say a thing is

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splendid, or a person is splendid. Do you? Splendor's gone. Magnificent is gone.

INTERVIEWER

How do you work now?

RHYS

I can't write any more. My hand is unsteady, so I have a very nice girl who comes along twice a week, sometimes three times, and I dictate to her. It was difficult at the start.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever try dictating into a tape recorder?

RHYS

No, because mechanical things always go wrong with me. If they possibly can, they do. If there is a thought or an idea that has been worrying me, I try to write it out, and try very hard to make it clear. Then when she comes I can dictate it to her. Of course it's by no means the same thing as writing.

INTERVIEWER

Is it an all-consuming occupation when you feel you must write?

RHYS

It seems as if I was fated to write. . . which is horrible. But I can only do one thing. I'm rather useless, but perhaps not as useless as everyone thinks. I tried to be an actress—a chorus girl—and the whole thing ended when I was handed a line to say: "Oh Lottie, don't be epigrammatic." But, when the cue came, the words just disappeared. That was that. I was interested in beauty—cosmetics—but when I tried to make a face cream, it blew up.

INTERVIEWER

Someone wrote that you have been fighting oblivion since the twenties, do you think this true?

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RHYS

I'm not fighting oblivion now. I'm fighting. . . eternity? I feel very isolated. I'm not sure men need women, but I'm sure that women need men. But then loneliness is a part of writing, isn't it? Though week after week, if you never see anyone, it can become rather trying. If there's a knock at the door, I expect some wonderful stranger. I fly to the door. But it's only the post man. I've got myself a bit depressed over this autobiography. When I began it I wrote a lot about the years after I came to England and I was more or less grown up, and of being in France, and lot of that. And then I got this idea that I wanted to write about the West Indies as they were, as I remembered them. And I find it very difficult, also I feel that nobody's going to believe me.

INTERVIEWER

Has anyone seen it?

RHYS

My editor's seen a sort of rough copy of it and she likes it, but it wasn't right. And I haven't got it quite right yet. Another worry is that I can't seem to find a title.

INTERVIEWER

Did you always have a title before you started a book?

RHYS

I've always known it before, but this time I can't. I've got a title, but the publisher's not pleased with it. They want to call it *Smile Please,* but I want to call it *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down.* That's what I feel is happening. Of course, I don't know. I only know what I read in the papers.

INTERVIEWER

You write in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* that it is always places you recall in your memory, not people. Is that still the case?

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RHYS

That was a character in the book who says that. I remember some places very well, but I think I remember people better.

INTERVIEWER

Was Paris your favorite place to be?

RHYS

In the twenties Paris was a very interesting place. Of course, I was delighted to get away from England. I like Paris. I made friends. Whenever I had some money, I'd shoot back to Paris. Paris sort of lifted you up. It's pink, you know, not blue or yellow; there's nothing like it anywhere else.

INTERVIEWER

You went back after you wrote *Good Morning, Midnight.*

RHYS

Oh yes, I went back in 1939, just before the war. The publisher was awfully pleased with the book. He rang me up to tell me how pleased he was, and I was very hopeful. But then war was declared, almost immediately, and they didn't want books. . . I was forgotten and I gave up writing.

INTERVIEWER

Absolutely?

RHYS

I didn't write for a long time. And then I wrote some short stories. And then there was this thing about doing *Good Morning, Midnight* on the BBC radio. And then I started *The Wide Sargasso Sea.*

INTERVIEWER

Where did the idea come from of reconstructing Bertha's life—the Jane Eyre heiress who sets fire to the house and jumps from the parapet?

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RHYS

When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life. Charlotte Brontë must have had strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books, like *Villette.* Of course, once upon a time, the West Indies were very rich, and very much more talked about than they are now.

INTERVIEWER

How about films of your books?

RHYS

Films are always going to happen but then they never do. They had an option on *The Wide Sargasso Sea.* They even went out to the West Indies to see where they were going to shoot it and even picked the house. Now I'm very skeptical. The director and the scriptwriter went out, that was several years ago. . . They made all sorts of arrangements, but some backer pulled away. They seem to think it would be a very expensive film. I really don't see why.

INTERVIEWER

Whenever you have costumes or houses that burn up, it's expensive, and you have *two* houses that burn up.

RHYS

But extras are very cheap. I suppose they have to take photographers, cameras, people. . . costs rather a lot, but I don't see that it would be too much more expensive than any other.

INTERVIEWER

Have you any desire to go to Paris?

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RHYS

I'll never go back now. I went back to the West Indies and I hated it. No, I think "Never Go Back" is a good motto.

INTERVIEWER

There's a title for your book. *Never Go Back.*

RHYS

But that's just what I'm doing. I *am* going back.

INTERVIEWER

What are you reading now?

RHYS

I'm reading a book of Daphne du Maurier. She's a good writer; I like the man who wrote *From Russia with Love*. . . Ian Fleming. He's one who can take you away from everything if you're bored and sad. Some books can really take you away. It's marvelous. Thrillers are my great thing now. I must say Americans dream up such awful horrors. But I'd like to get away myself. I'm always thinking of some place to run away to, like the desert, or Morocco. But I haven't got a car; so I can't drive. It means I'm always stuck here. But you know, one gets into a groove.

INTERVIEWER

But why not go to Morocco this winter?

RHYS

Do the women still wear veils there?

INTERVIEWER

Yes, many still do.

RHYS

They aren't very kind to women in Morocco, or perhaps that is exaggerated. One thinks of it as being exaggerated.

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INTERVIEWER

Au fond, I think women really run things there, though it would not seem as if they do.

RHYS

They are just as smart in France. It really doesn't look as if they are running things. But they often have control of the money. Not always, but often.

INTERVIEWER

You once wrote in *The Lotus* that people live much longer than they should, especially women.

RHYS

I'd planned to die at thirty, and then I'd push it on ten years, forty, and then fifty. You always push it on. And then you go on and on and on. It's difficult. Too much trouble. I've thought about death a great deal. One day in the snow I felt so tired. I thought, "Damn it, I'll sit down. I can't go on. I'm tired of living here in the snow and ice." So I sat down on the ground. But it was so cold I got up. Oh yes, I used to try to imagine death, but I always come up against a wall.

INTERVIEWER

And the book, that's the reason to go on now, no?

RHYS

But you know I'm beginning to feel that I don't want to do a mental striptease any more. Which would mean tearing up all I've written. I don't mind writing about when I was a child, but I don't quite know why I should go on writing so much about myself. I've had rather a rum life, but I was thinking the other day, would I go through it all again. I think not. I guess I write about myself because that's all I really know.

—**Elizabeth Vreeland**

In the winter of 1979, Jean Rhys died following an operation to insert a pin in a broken hip. She was eighty-four.

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Jean Rhys: A Remembrance

David Plante

I asked at reception for Mrs. Hamer. It always gave me pleasure to use her married name, not the name she was known by. She once told me some of the names she had used in her life to keep her life secret, and I forgot them. To refer to her as Mrs. Hamer, which was a private name, and not Jean Rhys, meant, I suppose, I was a part of her private world, the world she wanted to remain forever her world. I wondered why I should want to be a part of it. The receptionist, an old woman with lank hair, looked at the register. Behind her was a mirror and, on either side of the mirror, were white glass shells with lights inside. She said, "I don't think we have a Mrs. Hamer." I said, "Jean Rhys." "Yes," she said, "she's waiting in the pink lounge."

I was carrying a bottle of wine. The carpet of the pink lounge was patterned with large soft pink roses on a grey background. The wallpaper was pink. The floor lamps, lit, had great dark pink shades. Jean was sitting at the corner of a red sofa, under a lamp; she wore a wide-brimmed pink hat.

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Her head was lowered, her fist up to her chin, and she was staring at the floor, her blue eyes bulging a little. She did not look up as I approached.

I said, "Jean."

With a sudden jolt of her small, hunched body, as if I had frightened her, she dropped her hand and raised her head to look at me. "Oh David," she said, "I can't tell you how happy I am to see you."

I put the bottle of wine on the little table before the sofa and kissed her. "You're looking marvelous," I said.

"Don't lie to me," she said. "I'm dying."

I sat on the couch by her.

"Can I ask you something?" she said. "Will you go buy me a bottle of sweet vermouth? They don't have any in this hotel." She laughed, a small *ha,* that lifted her shoulders. "It's that kind of hotel." She looked about, as with sudden suspicion, and gave another small shrugging laugh. "A big dreary hotel in South Kensington filled with old people whom they won't allow to drink sweet vermouth."

On another red sofa across the room, and in big red armchairs, were old people, men and women, their canes held along side them or between their legs; none were talking, and some were asleep.

When I went out quickly to an off license, it occurred to me the day was bright, and I was very aware, when I came back to the hotel, of the grey interior, and all the lights lit with dim bulbs. I ordered glasses and ice from a waiter with satin lapels and a crooked black bow tie.

As I poured out the drinks on a table before us, Jean sat back and crossed her legs; she had to grab one leg and heft it across the other, and, once crossed, you thought she could never uncross them. I gave her a drink and she smiled. As she drank she pulled at the brim of her hat.

This was December, 1975. I hadn't seen her in a year, since the last time she had been up to London for a few weeks.

"Now," she said, "give me your news. I hope it's cheerful."

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I tried to make my news entertaining; she listened, drinking and pulling at her hat, her large blue eyes staring attentively at me. Sometimes she laughed.

"Now," she said, "I'll tell you my news."

She prepared herself by taking a drink.

"Well," she said, "I got a letter from the tax people. They said I hadn't paid my taxes. I got very upset. I thought I had. I'd sent everything off to my accountant, as he'd told me to. But a tax man came to the house and said I had to pay my taxes. I said I'd written to my accountant, but he said that didn't matter, I had to pay. I said I couldn't. He said, 'I'm only here on orders.' I said, 'That's what the fascists used to say.' He left angry. The next day I got a letter saying if I didn't pay my taxes they'd take my house away from me. I rang up my accountant. He said, 'Oh, they're always threatening to do things like that.' But I was worried. I was so worried, I fell. I've been dying ever since."

"I hate tax people," I said.

She bared her teeth. "Hate them," she said. "I know what they do. I know." She snorted. "Fascists!" Her drink splashed over her glass. "They take what I have and put it in their pockets." I wondered if she were joking, and I laughed; but her face twisted a little, and she bared her teeth again and said, "They've taken over the world." Then she looked at her drink. "Well, I'll be dead soon. They won't be able to get anything more from me." She drank.

I said, "The fact is I don't understand much about taxes and—"

She giggled. "Neither do I. I never did. I never understood anything that had to do with mathematics and machines, so I never understood more than half of what goes on in the world."

A thin young woman with black hair and dressed in black came into the pink lounge. She went to a window and drew closed the grey drapes over the net curtains, making the lounge dimmer. At her appearance, a number of old people, grabbing their canes for support, began to rise.

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Jean said, "That's the manageress. When she appears, everyone rises."

"Why?"

"She doesn't exactly announce it, but they know that when she comes in lunch is being served."

I sat with Jean as the old people followed the manageress out of the lounge into the dining room.

She said, "All those old people, all alone."

I looked at them.

Jean said, "This is a horrible hotel."

"It is a bit grim."

"Well," she said, "we'd better go in. The manageress will be annoyed if we're late. Will you give me my stick?"

I gave her first her purse, then her silver-topped stick, which she used to steady herself as I helped her up with my hand under her arm. She was surprisingly heavy, and dropped back. I got her to her feet, held her arm, picked up the bottle of wine from the table, and supported her as we walked slowly to the dining room.

She said, "Let's pretend you're my son. That'll cheer me up."

A waiter opened the bottle of wine while Jean and I studied the menus. She was wearing her glasses, got from her purse; the lenses were so smeared I wondered how she saw through them. We both ordered curried eggs. She put the glasses back in her purse. The waiter poured out the wine.

There was a smell of mould in the dining room. My napkin was almost wet.

With one glass of wine Jean began to giggle as she talked. I could only get words, as she held her hands, sometimes her napkin, to her mouth while she talked. Whenever she giggled I smiled. Her hands were as if disjointed at the knuckles.

With more wine, she ceased giggling. I still didn't understand most of what she said, which, spoken in a soft grave voice, seemed to me jumbled. She tugged more and more at her brim, pulled her hair, and rubbed her forehead, and I

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understood that what she was talking about was making her somewhat frantic. I heard: "The world. . . awful it is. . . gone *phut*. . . want out, that's all. . . taken over. . . not understanding, anyone. . . " She held out her glass to be refilled.

We had baked apples for pudding, but she left most of hers. She said, throwing her napkin down, "Thank God that's over. Now we can go up to my room for a drink."

Getting Jean up to her room was difficult. She leaned on me so heavily I at times lost balance. We lurched from piece of furniture to piece of furniture, wall to wall, she with her hand extended to lean for a moment before we continued. Sometimes her cane got caught between her legs. Getting her into the lift I had to twist my body, it seemed, in many directions at the same time. I could not imagine how she had got down to the lounge from her room. She leaned her small hunched back against the passage wall and sighed as I opened the door to her room with her key.

The room was all pink. There were two beds; a lamp, with a big pink shade, was on a table between the beds. Jean, in her pink hat, sat on a red armchair before a window with net curtains and red-brown drapes. She threw her cane down and closed her eyes; after a moment she opened her eyes wide, shook her head, and said, "Never mind."

"Never mind what?" I asked.

She laughed. "Let's have a drink," she said.

"What do you want?"

"Rum."

I went to the desk where the drinks, bottles and glasses were on a tray.

"The manageress won't let us have ice," she said.

"That's ridiculous. Of course we'll have ice." I rang.

She did not seem impressed or in any way proved wrong when the ice came; she might have thought the ice came because I was a man.

I said, "Jean, there's no rum here."

"No rum? Did you want rum?"

"No. You asked for it."

"Did I?" She passed her hand over her forehead. "That's

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strange, I must have thought I was in Dominica, where of course you'd have rum. But it's so long since I've been in Dominica. I'll have a gin and vermouth. And please don't put too much ice in. *They* fill the glass with ice so I won't drink too much. Well, why shouldn't I?''

I thought: yes, why shouldn't she? I gave her a big drink. I took a smaller one, lit a light in the dim room, and sat on a chair near hers.

''When were you last in Dominica?'' I asked.

''Oh years and years ago, on a visit. But I left when I was sixteen to come to England, and the visit later made me see that I could never go back to the island I knew as a girl. It was beautiful. It *was* so beautiful. When I went back I found all the rivers—you know, there are 365 rivers on Dominica, one for every day of the year—all were polluted. I used to drink from them when I was a girl. Gone, all gone. And who's responsible? Who?'' She crossed her legs. ''I know, I know.'' She snorted a little. ''Yeah. I know.''

I didn't know, and I didn't know if I should ask her. I said, ''Who?''

She stared at me. ''You're liberal, aren't you? I'm surrounded by liberals. You don't understand what's happening. *They're* taking over. Yeah. I know. I used to be liberal. No more.''

I said, ''I thought you told me you were once a communist.''

She laughed; her thin yellow teeth showed. ''I was a G.K. Chesterton sort of socialist, a cow and an acre of land for every man, that kind of thing. No.'' She threw up a hand; the other held the glass. ''Anyway, honey, I'll be dead before they take over.''

I said, ''We'll fight them together.''

''Will we?''

She pulled her brim and leaned forward. She said, ''I'm going to tell you something.''

I smiled at her.

''I'm going to tell you how I started to write.''

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I kept my smile, a smile, I recognize now, I always kept when she told me something that interested me very much, but which I did not want her to think I had in any way solicited from her. Perhaps one of the reasons I was with her was to hear how she started to write; but the moment she was about to tell me, I wasn't sure I wanted to hear, or wasn't sure I wanted her to think I did.

"Do you want to hear?" she asked.

"Of course I do."

"Maybe," she said, "you'll write it down. I can't now. I can't write. It'll never be written. I'll tell you, and you write it down."

"All right."

"Give me another drink first, honey."

I put a lot of ice in the drink and very little gin in the vermouth.

She raised her glass to me. "Here's to you."

"Here's to you," I said and raised my glass.

"No, not me. I don't matter. I never did, much. I don't now."

"That's not true."

"It is. It is true. I don't matter, and I want out." She looked at her drink as she brought it to her mouth. She said, "You put a lot of ice in this."

"It'll melt," I said.

"That's what they all say," she said.

Startling me, she suddenly stuck out her thin neck and shouted, "Oh what a Goddam shitty business we've taken on, being writers! Oh what shit! What shit!" She shook her head, with its hat, whenever she said "shit," as if to shake the word out with physical disgust. I had never heard her use the word before. "I'm over eighty." She had never revealed her age before. "Look at me. And what have I done? Nothing! Nothing! Mediocrity. Mediocre, that's what my work is. And these stories they want me to publish. Not good. I don't want to publish them. I've wasted two and a half years on them. I wanted to write about my life. I wanted to write my autobiography, because everything they say about me is wrong. I

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want to tell the truth. I want to tell the truth, too, about Dominica. No, it's not true we treated the black people badly. We didn't, we didn't. Now they say we did. No, no. I'm becoming a fascist. They won't listen. No one listens."

"I'm listening," I said.

"Oh yes, you," she said, as though I *would* listen. "I remember a black man in Dominica walking through the yard. My father and I were on the back steps of the house. My father made me give loaves of French bread—Dominica was once French and the bread was still in long loaves—and sixpence to poor black men who came to us. No women ever came. I recall this black man walking away from us, the loaf under his arm, and his dignity. His dignity and his unconquerable mind. Do you believe it?"

I asked, "What's that, Jean?" I was suddenly speaking, it seemed to me, from a great remoteness.

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Live and take comfort. . . thou has great allies; thy friends are exultations, agonies, and love, and man's unconquerable mind."

"I don't recognize it," I said.

"Fancy you don't know it. That's maybe because you're American. Americans are so stupid. They don't know anything, only their own literature, which isn't much. We're friends aren't we? You've got to forget about all past American writers. You've got to forget about Henry James. You've got to forget about America. Live and take comfort . . . thou has great allies; thy friends are exultations, agonies, and man's unconquerable mind—" She put her glass down, her hands to her face; when she took her hands away her face was wet and twisted with weeping. "—and man's unconquerable mind." She raised her hands. "Oh, to die like a tree falling. Oh, to be big, to be large, to be huge. That's what you have to be. To be big. There are no big people in the world now. You must be big." She picked up her drink, paused, then whispered in sing-song, "Oh England, my Eng-

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land, what can I do for you? No, that's wrong. What can I do for you, oh England, my England?" Her face tensed. She spat. "It's shit. It's shit, England." Her face became smooth, her eyes went out of focus. "And yet, and yet. Nelson, he was big. There were big people in England. He was like a Caesar. Kiss me, Hardy. He wasn't homosexual, I don't believe it. He was bisexual, as we all are. He was big, was great, was huge. He died for England. England? What can I do for you, oh England, my England? I came here when I was sixteen, to this cold dark country, where I was never warm." Her upper lip rose and she again spit. "Shit!" Immediately, her face relaxed again, became, it seemed, as soft and vague as her eyes. "And yet, I do know it has a certain gentleness, an honesty. Gone, all gone. In the West Country, there you can still find people who are like trees, and when they die they die like huge trees falling over. People close to the land. I'll never, never forget the dignity of that black man walking through the yard with his sixpence and the loaf of bread under his arm. And it's all gone, all gone. They've destroyed it themselves. Are there any men now like that black man? We didn't treat them badly, we didn't. They say we did. It's all gone, the dignity, and I want out. There are no big men left. It's all gone. I wanted to tell you how I started to write. I'm telling you. I'll never write it now that I'm telling you. Will you write it? If you don't, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters, nothing matters. It's all shit." She laughed. "I'm a slut without a penny." Her face twisted and she wept. "Nothing matters. Nothing." She laughed again, with a shrug of her body, and, in a very quiet voice, sang:

If you want to be happy,
Like a child with a toy balloon,
Turn your money over in your pocket
In the light of a full moon

She shook her head and drank. "Man's unconquerable mind. Fancy you don't know that. Upon this bank and shoal of time, I'll leap to time to come. Do you know that?"

I half frowned, half smiled. "Let me think—"

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"You don't know. It's because you're American, and Americans are stupid. You should know. You should know it all. You should know all the big writers, the big big writers." She raised her hand. "You have to be big." She lowered her hand. "And yet, and yet, I'm so small, I'm nothing."

"Jean," I said, "please—" I did not know how to respond to her. When she laughed, I smiled; when she wept, I stared sadly at her. Sometimes, because her feelings changed so quickly, I stared when she laughed, and smiled when she wept.

She said, "Listen to me. I want to tell you something very important. All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. And there are trickles, like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must keep feeding the lake. It is very important. Nothing else is important."

Tears came to my eyes.

"Do you believe that?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But you now should be taking from the lake before you can think of feeding it. You must dip your bucket in very deep."

I blinked to rid my eyes of tears.

"Oh David, oh, what one could do, what one could do! Not I. I can't do anything. I don't matter. What matters is the lake. And man's unconquerable mind."

I reached out and held her wrist for a moment.

Jean's upper lip drew up as if she'd tasted something very sour, and she began to cry; the tears ran down her nose and cheeks, and when she wiped them away with the sides of her crooked hands, her make-up smeared. She looked at me, weeping and, I thought, pleading with me. I said, "I'll get you a tissue." I went into the bathroom and brought back a bit of toilet tissue for her. She put her drink down, wiped her eyes, blew her nose. She sat still.

Suddenly she shouted, "I hate. I hate. Do they under-

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stand? No. Does anyone understand? I hate. I hate them. We didn't treat them badly. We didn't. I hate them." She put her hand to her chin and looked down. "And yet I was kissed once by a Nigerian, in a café in Paris, and I understood, a little. I understand why they are attractive. It goes very deep. They danced, danced in the sunlight, and how I envied them."

She stopped, appeared to collapse inwardly, her drink resting on her crossed leg; then she seemed to suddenly rouse herself internally.

Again she shouted, "Oh David, I'm unhappy. You be happy. I'm so unhappy, all my life I've been so unhappy. It's unfair. I'm dying. I want to die. It's unfair. I'm dying, my body's dying, and inside I think: it's unfair, it's unfair, I've never lived, I've never lived."

She sank back and finished her drink.

"But I don't care any more. I'm not even interested in make-up any more. I'm going to give up on my life. I'm indifferent, even to passion. I'll wear red slacks, a shabby silk blouse, and a red wig.

"Give me another drink, will you, honey? And put only one cube in it."

I did. I took another for myself; but, attentive and in my attention frightened of Jean, I didn't get drunk.

She said, "I wanted to tell you how I started to write. I was living in Holborn. I hated it, the bed-sitting-room. A girl friend came. No, she wasn't a girl friend. We were in a movie together. I can't remember her name. She said, "Move to Chelsea. You'll have a good time in Chelsea. You'll get over him there." I moved, not to Chelsea, but to Fulham, into a room that was exactly like the one I left. I was going to my room one day and I saw in a shop window some quills, red and green and blue, and I thought, how pretty, I'll buy some quill pens to liven up my grim little room. I went into the shop. I didn't know why, but I bought a copy book, too, a thick copy book with shiny black covers and a red edge. I bought, too, nibs, a blotter, ink. When I got back to my

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room I put everything on a table. I swear, I swear I didn't know what I was about to do until the palms of my hands began to tingle and I knew, all at once, that I was going to write, I was going to write in the copy book everything that had happened to me, and I started then. I wrote for days.

"I filled out the copy book and I put it under my underclothes in the back of a drawer. When I went to Holland to marry Jean I packed it. I packed it, over and over, every time we moved, and we moved about a lot. Anyway—" She closed her eyes slowly, as if she were very tired.

I said, "Would you like to rest now, Jean?"

She opened her eyes, as if surprised. "Don't go now, honey. Stay. But maybe you want to go."

"No," I said, "I want to stay."

"How can you like listening to me talk on and on?"

I said, "I used to listen to my mother—"

The corner of her upper lip rose and her face took on the hardness of an old whore who, her eyes red with having wept for so long, suddenly decides to be hard. "Your mother?" she snapped. "I don't want to hear about your mother!"

I shut up. I thought: what am I doing here, listening to her? Is it because she is a writer? I am not sure I have read all her books, not even sure I admire her very greatly as a novelist. Is it because I want to know her well enough that I will know her better than anyone else, or know at least secrets she has kept from everyone else, which I will always keep to myself? If so, why?

She said, pulling the brim of her soft wide hat so it now hung unevenly about her head, "Jean and I lived in Paris. We lived in a hotel. We didn't have any money. I suggested to Jean that he write some articles and I would translate them. I remembered meeting Mrs. Adam in London, through Rebecca West. Mrs. Adam was the Paris correspondent for the *Daily Mirror.* I took the articles to her. She said she couldn't use them. Then, I suppose when she saw the desperation on my face, she asked me if I wrote anything. I said, at first, no. But, I don't know why, I remembered the copy

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book I had filled up with writing years before. I told her about it. She said she wanted to see it. I went home, I wrapped it in newspaper, and left it with her concierge, and I thought, well, that's the last of that. She got in touch with me. She asked me if she could type it out and alter it, and I said yes. I didn't know what she saw in it. She called it *Triple Sec.* She asked me if she could send it to Ford Madox Ford. I didn't know who he was. She said, 'He runs a review, the *Transatlantic Review,* and he's very famous for spotting good young writers and helping them.' Well, she sent it." Jean raised her arm and let her hand fall into her lap. "And that's how I got to know Ford."

With the mention of his name, I became more attentive, and more, I think, frightened. Here Jean was talking to me about this most private episode, the episode about which, she had said in her only references to it, so many people had told lies, lies, lies. It was as if she suddenly opened the door to the closed center of her life, a café in Paris in the twenties, and in the café were Jean and Ford and his wife Stella at one table, and at other tables were Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, and half-blind James Joyce. I thought, staring at her: you are attentive to her, not as Mrs. Hamer, but Jean Rhys; you are not really interested in the private life of Mrs. Hamer, but very much in that of Jean Rhys. It is because she is a writer that you see her, sit with her, listen to her; your interest in her is literary. Her head was tilted and she was looking at me. You want to know her secrets because they have to do with Jean Rhys, the writer.

I said, "Jean, I think I should go."

She said, wistfully, her eyes large, "Do you, honey?"

"I should."

She smiled. Her eyes went out of focus. She said, "You've cheered me up."

"I'm glad."

"One more," I said.

"I promise I won't bore you."

"You don't bore me."

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I gave her another drink. She reached for it with both hands. Her make-up had streaked down her face with her crying, and her hair, which had been pulling at, stuck out stiffly under the warped brim. Her eyes and nose were red.

She said, "Tell me about yourself."

"I'd much rather hear about you."

"You would say that."

I laughed. I asked, "Quote me some more lines of poetry."

She laughed, too. "You like that?"

"Yes."

She rubbed her forehead. "...man's unconquerable mind.," she said.

"Because I'm an American and inveterately stupid," I said, "tell me who wrote that."

She frowned a little, as if it were an embarrassment to say something so obvious. "Wordsworth."

"Which bit?"

"To Toussaint l'Ouverture, the black man who governed St. Domingo and led the free slaves—"

"I see," I said.

When she drank, the drink spilled down the side of her chin onto her dress; she did not seem aware. It was as if she had to look all over the room to find me before she could stare at me and say, "I'll die soon." Her eyes narrowed on me. "I'll die without having lived." A sneer came over her face, and I had the the uncomfortable feeling that she was sneering at me. She said, with the sneer, "Upon this blank and shoal of time, I'll leap to time to come." Her head wobbled. "Yes, yes, I'll leap. I want out." She leaned towards me. "You don't understand. You never understood. I want out. I never wanted to be a writer. Never. I couldn't help it. All I wanted was to be happy."

I put my glass down on the table between us. I said, "Jean, excuse me."

She slumped back.

I got up, went, moving carefully about the furniture, to

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the bathroom just off her room. I peed, washed my face. I looked at myself in the mirror above the wash basin. When I came out, I thought Jean had died: slumped, she was utterly motionless, her eyes wide open and blank. I stood over her, said, "Jean," and her body, it appeared, was shocked into attention to me; she looked up at me, and after a while, in a slurred voice, said, "I know, you've got to go." "I really have got to," I said.

"Before you go," she said, "help me to the toilet."

It took a lot of maneuvering to get her up and into the bathroom; I left her, her hat still on, holding to the wash basin. In her room, I walked about. There were vases of flowers on the bureau, with cards. I thought: she's been in there a long time. I heard: "Oh my God!," and it occurred to me that she had seen her face in the mirror. I waited more, a longer while. I heard her say, "David, David." I went to the bathroom door, leaned close to it, and called, "Jean." There was no response. "Jean," I called. She said, in a weak voice, "Help me." I thought: but I can't go in. What does she want me for in there? "Help me," she said. I opened the door a little, imagining, perhaps, that if I opened it only a little only a little would have happened. I saw Jean, her head with the battered hat leaning far to the side, her feet, with knickers about her ankles, just off the floor, stuck in the toilet. I had, I immediately realized, forgotten to lower the seat after I had peed. Jean said, with a kind of moan, "Help me." Her eyes were huge. She was clasping her raised knees. I put my arms around her, and lifted her. I held her, but I was frightened to hold her too closely because she felt so frail, and I thought I might hurt her. Her body shook as she sobbed. The brim of her hat was under my chin; with one hand I took off her hat, put it on the washbasin, and, holding Jean, kissed her on her forehead. I held her till she stopped sobbing.

I said, "Shall I try to carry you to the bed or can you walk?"

"I'll try to walk," she said.

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But she was hobbled by her knickers. I leaned her against a wall, bent down, asked her to lift one foot then the other, and took off her sopping knickers. We walked small step by small step to the bed. I turned her round so she could sit on the foot and she dropped backwards. She couldn't raise herself to lie full length. I drew her up by holding her under her arms and pulling slowly, but she was very heavy; the bedspread rucked under her. I finally got her full length. She was shivering. She said, "I'm so cold." I took a blanket from the second bed and covered her. She rolled her head back and forth against the pillow, and, weeping, said, "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters." Tears came from her nose as from her eyes; she tried to sniff them back. Her entire face, swollen and red, was wet. She wailed, "Nothing matters. Nothing matters."

I thought: what shall I do?

I said, "Jean, I must go out for a moment. I'll be back, I promise."

She didn't answer.

In the hotel lobby, my hand shaking, I rang the only person I knew of who could help, Sonia Orwell. She had first introduced me to Jean some years before. She had helped Jean by getting her to London, entertaining her, taking her to the doctor's and dentist's, doing her laundry and ironing, shopping for her, and seeing her every day. I said to Sonia, "She seems to be having an attack." She said she would come in fifteen minutes. I went back to Jean, who was still quietly moaning, "It doesn't matter."

Sonia came; she said severely, "For God's sake, David, don't you know when someone's drunk too much?"

She told me to leave Jean to her now.

The next morning I rang Sonia. I said, "I want Jean to know I wasn't embarrassed and I hope she wasn't."

Sonia laughed. She said, "I'm putting Jean in another hotel. Give her a day or two to recover, then visit her. But, please, remember to close the toilet seat next time."

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She was staying now in a suite in a lovely small hotel off Portobello Road. The windows at the back gave out to a garden with big bare trees. Jean, wearing a long blue dressing gown, was sitting in a beautiful chair in the middle of the sitting room.

She said, "Now, David, if that ever happens to you with a lady again, don't get into a panic. You put the lady on her bed, cover her, put a glass of water and a sleeping pill on the bedside table, turn the light down very low, adjust your tie before you leave so you'll look smart, say at reception that the lady is resting, and when you tell the story after, make it funny."

I ordered glasses and ice. A young man with a long gold earring, white hair, and a suit that looked as though made of black plastic, came in with a tray; he placed the tray on a low table by Jean and kissed her, said, "Darling, blue has to be your favourite colour, it suits you so," and Jean, giggling, said, "I never wear green, that's an unlucky colour for me." The young man made the drinks for us.

Jean raised her glass to me and smiled; I raised mine to her.

She was, I realized, happy: she was wearing a pretty dressing gown in a pretty room. One of the signs of Jean's happiness, I came to realize, was her sadness, as though her happiness allowed her to deny the happiness, and be, at least a little, sad. When she was really unhappy, she was angry. She had been unhappy at the hotel in Kensington; however, instead of taking a practical step to change the hotel, even to asking for another to be found for her, she simply raged, as though nothing could be done and all she could do was rage. Now, in the hotel off Portobello, she smiled a little sadly when I told her she was looking beautiful.

She said, "Wouldn't what happened to us make a funny story? We should write it."

I was somewhat amazed that she should so quickly think of turning the episode of falling into the toilet bowl into a story; but I was excited, too. "Yes, let's," I said. Then an uncomfortable feeling came over me which I then didn't recognize,

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but which I now do: a feeling as of stealing manuscripts or letters from Jean, though she was allowing me to steal them, a feeling of some presumption, because *of course* I would be tempted to steal manuscripts and letters, *of course* I would want to write a short story with Jean. Again, I wondered if my deepest interest in her was as a writer I could take advantage of. I did not like this feeling. Though I wanted to start writing the story immediately, I let it drop; I wanted her to realize the idea came from her, not me, and it was up to her to act on it. But, too, I wanted to let her know I was interested; she very quickly imagined no one was interested at all.

She said, "What names shall we use for the old woman, the young man?"

"I'll get some paper," I said.

"Yes, do."

I visited Jean often, and each time we worked a little on the story. I wrote bits of it at home and read them out to her; she corrected. The manuscript became very messy. One of Jean's notes, dictated, was: "Cut down on her drink. Only two goes of malt whiskey." Jean was responsible for most of the dialogue, I for the descriptions. She gave the story its name: "Shades of Pink." After a couple of weeks, as I became more interested in finishing the story, Jean seemed to me to become less. She finally said, "You keep it now and do what you want with it. It's a gift." At home, I cut it down to a few pages, following the advice she said Ford had given her: "When in doubt, cut." I put it in a bottom drawer.

Jean stayed on in the hotel over the winter. She was correcting the proofs of a collection of short stories, *Sleep it Off, Lady*. She once asked me to read out the story "Rapunzel, Rapunzel." She asked me to cut a sentence, then said, "It's a bad story. They're all bad storeis. Mediocre. Worse than bad. What can I do? The reviews, quite rightly, will be condemning. I shouldn't have allowed them to be published. But it's done, they'll be published, and maybe it won't matter. What I wanted to do was to write my autobiography, but no one seems interested in that. I can't do it myself. No one can help me."

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From her letters, I knew that Jean could write with only great difficulty, her words large and shaky. I had also seen her sign books for visitors, holding the pen clutched between her thumb and middle finger and jabbing at the paper.

I said, "Look, Jean, if it's a question of your needing someone to write down what you want to dictate, I'd be happy to do that."

She looked at me; she appeared doubtful. "Would you?"

The uncomfortable feeling came over me. "Of course I would."

"You see," she said, "I just wanted to get down a few facts to correct the lies that have been said. I want to do that before I die."

We started, I think, the next day, after lunch. She sat in a chair with a big pillow behind her, and she had one drink to get her going. She dictated a passage which, in connection with her fiction, followed on directly from *Voyage in the Dark;* the heroine of that novel, who lived in Langham Street, might have written the opening sentences of Jean's dictation; recalling her recovery from her "illegal operation": "After I got better, I stayed on in the flat in Langham Street. I didn't suffer from remorse or guilt. I didn't think at all like women are supposed to think, but I was very tired. My predominant feeling was one of intense relief. I was not at all unhappy. It was like a pause in my life, a very peaceful time. I didn't see him, but he sent me a big rose plant in a pot and a very beautiful kitten."

After a few pages of dictation, she fell back on the cushion and closed her eyes; she suddenly opened them, shook her head, and said, "Never mind. Let's have a drink now."

We sat drinking, and she, lounging back on her pillow, told me stories from her life. We were very easy with one another, and in the easy way she talked about her life, I talked about mine. We were spirited. But it was when we talked about writing that we got excited. Her excitement was in her eyes.

She said, "I think and think for a sentence, and every

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sentence I think for is wrong, I know it. Then, all at once, the illuminating sentence comes to me. Everything clicks into place."

What had happened to us in the bathroom was not more personal than our talk about writing; if we could talk about what had happened, we could talk about writing in the most open and vulnerable ways, which, perhaps, we would not want anyone else to hear.

I felt I could ask her anything. I said, "Do you ever think of the meaning of what you write?"

"No. No." She raised a hand. "You see, I'm a pen. I'm nothing but a pen."

"And do you imagine yourself in someone's hand?"

Tears came to her eyes. "Of course. Of course. It's only then that I know I'm writing well. It's only then that I know my writing is true. Not really true, not as fact. But true as writing. That's why I know the Bible is true. I know it's a translation of a translation of a translation, thousands of years old, but the writing is true, it *reads* true. Oh to be able to write like that! But you can't do it. It's not up to you. You're picked up like a pen, and when you're used up you're thrown away, ruthlessly, and someone else is picked up. You can be sure of that: someone else will be picked up."

I went to Jean, week after week, three or four days a week. Sometimes she was too tired to dictate, having been out to lunch or to shop the day before. We talked. I half imagined she told me a lot about her life hoping I would write down what she had told me the past day, that I had been listening to Jean for the sake of writing down what she had said, I wrote down, not what she said, but my reactions; this, too, I felt was using my interest in, my love for Jean, to simply write.

I was reminded of Pascal: *"Curiosité n'est que vanité; on ne voyage sur la mer que pour en parler—"*

One grey day in late March, after she had dictated from previous visits a number of disconnected bits about her life, we tried to organize them chronologically. She found this

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very difficult, as she couldn't recall the sequence of events of so many years before. I had been careful not to interfere in what she dictated; I told her I was the one machine she could use. (She had never learned to type because she couldn't understand machines. She refused to speak into a tape recorder because it was an incomprehensible machine. It took me three visits to teach her how to open a compact she was given as a gift.) But, now I began to help her to sort out the months and years of her life: 1917, 1918, 1919. She often passed her hand over her face in her attempts to remember, and when she slumped back on her pillow, as if, suddenly, uninterested, I said, "Come on, Jean, when did you and your husband stay at Knoeck-sur-Mer and for how long?" She raised herself from the pillow and tried to concentrate. She said, "All I can remember is the sea, cold and green." "Try," I said. "1923, I think," she said, "and we stayed for two weeks. It was cheap. We bathed. We recovered." I stayed with her a long time, till long past her supper. As we got into the chronology, we were uncertain about the dates.

1913—Jean's sad Christmas

1914—Moved to Fulham, wrote "diary," moved back to Holborn, which was more familiar. Met a journalist, who took her to the Crabtree Club every night. The club was CLOSED FOR THE DURATION, as a sign on the door said, in August, 1914. Survived on money from "him."

1915—Worked in a canteen for soldiers

1916—

1917—Met Jean Lenglais, to whom she became engaged.

1918—Jean L. went to Holland. Jean was to follow after Armistice, but there were no boats to Holland.

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1919—Early in year, Jean set a letter to "him" to tell him she would no longer need his money, and went to Holland to marry Jean L. They stayed in the Hague briefly, which Jean didn't like, and in the autumn they went to Paris and lived in a hotel. Jean got a job teaching English to the children of a French Jewish family, the Richelots, who became helpful friends. A son was born and died.

1920—Early in year, Jean L., somehow in connection with the Inter Allied Commission, went to Vienna. After a few months, Jean went to Vienna to join him.

1921—Vienna. Jean L. had Japanese friends with whom he did business in exchanging money, shillings and yen. Lovely summer.

1922—Commission went to Budapest, Jean L. too. With a Japanese passport. Jean went to London. "They stopped me, they said, 'You don't look Japanese.'" She stayed at the Berkeley Hotel, where she discovered she was to have a child. She was happy. This was the only time she liked London. She returned to Budapest to join her husband, but found that "everything had gone wrong," and they had to run away. They got as far as Brussels. In May, a daughter was born. As soon as she was able, Jean left her daughter in a clinic and went to London to raise money "from the only person who, as usual, would give it." Her husband stayed in Brussels—or perhaps went to Amsterdam, where he always went when he didn't have a job, didn't know what to do. Jean met him at Ostende and they went to Knoeck-sur-Mer. Their daughter remained in the clinic; they had very little money, some of which they sent to the clinic to keep their daughter a while longer. Jean and her husband went to Paris. Jean suggested to her husband, who was, among other things, a journalist, that he write some articles in French, and she would translate them. She took them to Mrs. Adam, who worked on the *Daily Mirror,* and whom she knew from London. Mrs. Adam

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turned down the articles, but asked Jean if she herself wrote. "Well, you know the rest of this bit."

1923/24—Jean L. went to Amsterdam ("Can't recall why, maybe because his mysterious job took him there.") and Jean stayed with Mrs. Adam. She went to Brussels, all in one day, to take her daughter from the clinic ("She had grown and was heavy.") and returned to Mrs. Adam. When her husband came back to Paris, they all lived in a hotel near the Gare Montparnasse. Jean got back one day to find her husband gone. The landlady said, "He was arrested." The Richelots found a place for her daughter. Ford and Stella wrote to her to ask her to have dinner with them. They knew her husband had been arrested, and during dinner they asked her to stay with them.

Stella was patronizing; she gave Jean yellow lunch tickets for meals at a cheap restaurant, and when they were all in a taxi she made Jean sit on the *strapontain.* Ford was a liar, he lied about being in a terrible storm crossing the channel, but he didn't lie about his youth, which he talked about mostly. Ford and Stella were both snobs. Ford was a romantic snob; his great ambition was to be like an Englishman, but a certain kind of Englishman, strong and silent, and sometimes he succeeded. Stella was a down to earth, business-like snob, grimly determined to get on. She found out about people in Montparnasse. All the time Jean knew her, she never knew her to read. She said she detested books and got all her pleasure visually from pictures. She was quite a good painter. Ford knew such a lot and took such a lot of care over Jean's writing. He was kind. He took her to the Cluny museum to see the tapestries, and took her to meet people: Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein (Jean talked with Alice), and once, going to a party, they shared the lift with James Joyce, who stood behind Jean and told her the back of her dress was undone, and he tried to hook it up. (But Jean is not interested in putting these names in her autobiography.) Ford, reading aloud from her writing, would exclaim, "Cliché! Cliché!" If

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he liked what he read, he put on a special solemn voice. He read in the presence of Stella, the three of them together. He got Jonathan Cape to publish her first book of stories, *Left Bank,* in 1927.

Ford found Jean a job in the south of France. He knew an American woman, a Mrs. H——, who believed she was, among other reincarnations, the reincarnation of Madame du Barry. She believed that if you could remember the civilizations you had lived in and dressed and furnished your house according to your recollections this would make you happy. Mrs. H——'s former selves came from different periods of civilization: Egypt, Persia, Gothic, Directoire, English 18th, French 18th. Greece and Rome were skipped. She needed a ghost writer to help her with her work: she wanted to write a book about decorating. Ford sent her an article on English 18th Century furniture and a fairy story called "The Tale of Dusham, a Serbian Tale," which he had written but said Jean had written. Mrs. H—— engaged Jean.

1925—Jean went to Juan les Pins, rather glad to get away from the Fords. The H——s, wife and husband, lived in the Chateau Juan les Pins, which had been built by a Russian before the revolution who shot himself after gambling his fortune away. Jean found a flat, thought of staying and having her daughter come down. Mrs. H—— said she knew several people who wanted books ghosted. Mrs. H—— wore a simple black dress outside the house (she disapproved of short skirts) and in the house wore long gowns. She had one that was pink with long sleeves and green lining which you saw when she raised an arm. She disapproved of Mr. H——'s gambling, and gave him only a certain amount. Jean went out once with him to Monte Carlo to gamble, which she quite liked. Mr. H—— said that every night at the casino someone committed suicide, and they quickly put the body in the piano to hide it. He made scent. He had a little room with all the essential oils. He said you could only get the essential oils in France, not in England or America, where essential oils are

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heavily taxed and because of that scents made in America and England use artificial essential oils. He had a pile of linen handkerchiefs on his desk and a yellow rose. He put some scent on the handkerchief and had you smell the rose, then the scent, to compare. Once, on the way back from the casino, he tried to kiss her in the back seat of the car. The chauffeur must have seen, and said something. Jean took dictation from Mrs. H——, who wanted to describe a room decorated in the Egyptian style. She said, "The piano must have an Egyptian sound." She left Jean to describe a banquet, and Jean thought there should be skulls on the table. They were, Mr. and Mrs. H——, really quite nice.

Then Ford sent a letter to Mrs. H——. It was rude. He accused Mrs. H—— of paying Jean less than a house maid in New York—"'exploiting her shamelessly'—no, not shamelessly, that's not a Ford word—'exploiting her disgracefully.'" Mrs. H—— came to Jean with the letter, not smiling. She thought Jean had written to Ford. There was now no question of Jean's staying on. And as for Jean's work, Mrs. H—— said, "It's in long hand. I can't accept what you've done in long hand. It has to be typed before I pay you." Jean went to Nice and in a street near the Negresco found the office of an American newspaper, where a girl typed the pages for nothing. Mrs. H—— said she was going to Paris and Jean could travel with her. She was affable on the trip, and they dined together. In the Gare de Lyons, Ford met them, smiling, his hand out, and Mrs. H—— walked past with her porter wheeling the luggage, her head in the air, without speaking to Ford or saying goodbye to Jean. She was meeting her daughter, Natasha, who was the wife of Rudolf Valentino. But later Mrs. H—— visited Jean in her hotel with her peke. She said her daughter had asked, first thing, "Have you got any hooch?"

Ford found a room for Jean in the Hotel de la Rive, near the Gare Montparnasse. At drinks before lunch, Jean tried to get from him why he had sent the letter to Mrs. H——. He said, "She was exploiting you disgracefully, wasn't paying

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you as much as a house maid in New York." But he never really explained.

All of this Jean left out of the novel *Quartet* because it did not fit into the novel's shape.

Jean was disappointed. She was at loose ends. Ford seemed her only friend. She fell for him. She thought she fell for him. Stella was completely hostile.

Jean used a lot of the money she had made in the south of France to buy her daughter a pretty blue dress. Her husband had got out of prison, could stay in Paris only a few days before he had to leave for Amsterdam. Ford said Jean mustn't have anything to do with him. He himself couldn't have anything to do with him, as he was sure to come back and be arrested again. "I can't get mixed up in a thing like that," Ford said. But he and Stella said they did want to meet him, and Jean was taken by them to meet her husband at a café, La Taverne Panthéon. She went to stay with her husband for the few days he was allowed to remain in Paris. Ford and Stella were angry. Ford took Jean's going back to her husband as the end of everything. He couldn't have anything to do with her. When her husband left for Holland he took their daughter with him; she was wearing the expensive pretty blue dress.

Jean stayed in another hotel, depressing, in the rue Vavin, off the Boulevard Montparnasse. She collapsed, but, collapsed, nevertheless started *Quartet*.

Ford and Stella lent her money to return to the south of France. She stayed in l'Hotel les Oliviers, Crus-de-Caigns. She met Paul Nash. Ford paid for the hotel.

Jean felt depressed, in a rage. She felt that all Ford had said about her writing, his concern for it, was false. That was what hurt most: she had imagined she had been a bit in love with Ford, but she wasn't, and she didn't think he was ever in love with her, but only in her writing, and he was, finally, false to that, because she couldn't believe he could behave as he had and still be sincere about her work.

Her husband sent her a letter in the south of France from

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Amsterdam saying he would return to Paris, though he had no passport. He knew he could stay there with someone without the police knowing. Jean went straight to Paris. And because she didn't know what else to do, didn't want to stay in Paris, hated Ford, she accepted her husband's offer to go to Amsterdam, though he was angry about what had happened between his wife and Ford, whom he hated, too. He never forgave Jean for Ford. They went almost immediately, and left their daughter in Paris at the place the Richelots had found there.

Ford got Jean a job translating *Perversité,* by Francis Carco. The slang was difficult, and her husband had to help. When the book was published, Ford was credited with being the translator. Ford said it was Covici, the Chicago publisher, who used his name instead of Jean's because it had more drawing power. Jean didn't care or think about it much at the time. The book was banned.

In Amsterdam, Jean finished *Quartet.* ("Now I am confusing the novel and what actually happened.")

Her husband went to Paris to take their daughter back to Holland. People had been wanting to adopt her. Jean refused, her husband had thought it a good thing.

When the novel was finished, Jean went to London to try to sell it, though she hated it. She was ill. Her husband persuaded her to go. Through Ford, Jean had an agent in London, Leslie ———. He had written Ford asking him if Ford wanted an agent, and Ford had replied that he himself didn't, but he knew of a writer who could use an agent, Jean. Leslie ——— gave the book to Edward Garnett, a kind comfortable man, an influential publisher's reader. He said that Cape, who had published *Left Bank,* didn't want to publish *Quartet* because of libel, but Chatto would. They all had tea. Jean and Leslie had a fifty-fifty affair. The book was sold in America, from which Jean got enough money to go to Paris, alone.

Though Jean did not stay long in Paris, she wrote half of *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie.* She returned to Leslie in London.

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1937—By now, Jean's husband was very distant. When he found out about Leslie, he asked for a divorce. He asked, too, for possession of their daughter. He wrote Jean a nice letter: they couldn't go on as they were, he wanted their daughter to be educated in Holland, but she could visit on holidays. Jean agreed.

1938—Jean and Leslie eventually married. Jean wrote *Voyage in the Dark,* which was based on the original exercise books Ford had insisted she keep. "You'll want to use them."

Leslie died, and Jean married his cousin, Max Hamer, and started work on her last novel, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*—

Jean said, "I can't go on, David, I can't. This isn't the way I work." We never again attempted to make a chronology.

In November, Jean came back to London. She was put into a small flat in Chelsea, just across the Thames from where I lived in Battersea. She had a young woman help her with her baths and dressing, and her friends to prepare lunches and dinners, and to entertain her. She didn't like the flat. The walls of the sitting room were green. Bad luck. She was quite sure it was a mistake to have come up to London, but she so hated Devon in the winter; maybe, though, she would return to her cottage when she recovered a little from her trip.

She had, over the summer, dictated more of her autobiography to a young writer who lived near her in Devon, Michael Schowb. This consisted more of memories of her early life on the West Indian island of Dominica, where she was born. It would make up the first part of her autobiography. She asked if I would continue to help her if she stayed in London. I was writing myself, but I said, "Yes, of course."

Often, crossing Chelsea Bridge on my way to her, I would think: You don't want to go to Jean's, you want to say home to do your own writing. Also, I had very little money, and thought I should use the time I was with Jean to do a translation job, or write blurbs or book reports for a publisher.

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Helping her became difficult. She needed a drink to start, a drink to continue, and yet another, and after two hours she was muddled, couldn't remember what she'd been saying, and she'd repeat, over and over, that, say, Victorian knife sharpeners were terribly good, you just stuck the knife in and turned the handle and the knife came out sharp and clean, so you didn't have to clean them on wood, and they were much better than stainless steel knives—which showed that in many ways the Victorians were very clever, not what people think now. But people don't understand. No one understands. No one! I was never quite sure what she wanted to go into the autobiography and what she was simply talking drunkenly about. I put in everything I thought interesting by condensing it often to a sentence fragment to insert somewhere later: the Victorian knife sharpener her father brought from England so the help wouldn't have to sharpen the knives on wood. A flash of anger would sometimes pass through her eyes when I'd read a passage to her to make sure I'd got it right, and she'd say, "No, that's not right."

In a little black briefcase that opened into a file, she kept the many bits and pieces of the autobiography, plus earlier writing on yellowing, torn paper. I wanted to go through them and sort them out, but I couldn't presume; they seemed in the file to be very private. The time came in our work, however, to organize the autobiographical pieces. Versions of the same section, or detached paragraphs, confused her; she would ask me to read the different versions, she would choose what she thought the best, and then tell me to tear up the others. I tore up wastepaper baskets full. She seemed to get satisfaction from this, as if getting rid of something was a great clarification. (And, in fact, she told me that to her writing was a way of getting rid of something, something unpleasant especially. She asked me once to write down for her a short poem that was going round and round her head. "Two hells have I/Dark Devon and Grey London—/ One purgatory: the past—" And after I wrote it down she said, "Thank God, now I can forget that.") After as much

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clarification by tearing up what could be done, there still remained a mass of bits. Jean often talked of the "shape" of her books: she imagined a shape, and everything that fit into the shape she put in, everything that didn't she left out, and she had left out a lot. She could not see the shape yet of the autobiography. Some chapters were together, some were in fragments, and she wasn't at all sure of the order of the chapters, much less the fragments in the chapters. We spent days trying, in our minds, trying to fit together pieces, which, to remember, we gave names. Jean would often say, "It can't be done. It's too jumbled." I might say, "Well, Jean, this bit about your mother, don't you think it should go into the Mother chapter?" She'd become enthusiastic. "Good. We'll do that."

One evening, as I was sitting with her while she ate her soup, I said, "Jean, why don't I do a paste-up of what's already been done of the autobiography?"

"A paste up?"

I tried to explain, but it was like trying to explain a computer system to her.

She said, "If you think so."

"I'll do it tonight. You'll see, it'll help us."

She said, "Please put it all in chronological order and cut out all the repetitions."

I took the entire autobiography with me. Crossing Chelsea Bridge, the feeling came over me, as it often comes over me to jump when I am at a height, to throw the folder into the river. In my small study, before the gas fire, I spread pages and parts of pages on the floor. I cut out paragraphs which Jean had wanted to save from what she wanted to throw out. I cut in half a section called the Zouaves. I pasted the pages and paragraphs and sometimes single sentences in what I thought the right order on large sheets.

The next day I brought the paste-up to Jean and read the whole thing straight through. She said nothing. As I read, I saw her, her head tilted to the side, glance sideways from time to time at the page.

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I asked, hoarsely, "What do you think?"

"Fine," she said weakly.

"Now," I said, "I'll take it home and type it all up."

I left when her editor came to help her to bed.

In the morning her editor rang me. She said that Jean had gone into a frightful state after I left, so frightful the editor hoped she would never have to see anyone in such a state again. She was drunk and swearing and thought I had destroyed her book; she thought, too, I would lose it. She was particularly upset that I had cut in half a section called "The Zouaves." She said, "It's David's book now, not mine." Her editor asked if we could have lunch the following day.

I spent all that day and the next morning typing out the paste-up. I put the two halves of "The Zouaves" together. Before I went to lunch, I stopped by Jean's and left the new typescript off.

I said, "Jean, this is *your* book, not mine or anyone else's."

She said, "Of course it is, and if I don't like it I'll tear it up and throw it away."

"Good," I said.

I decided on my way to lunch that I would have nothing more to do with it. I thought Jean might have instructed her editor to say as much; but, in her office, she gave me a cheque for £500. Later, I found out that in fact it came from Jean, who had instructed her editor to tell me it came from the house.

I did not mention the autobiography again to Jean. I saw her often, as it was the holiday season. On New Year's there was a champagne party in her flat. She, sitting in the midst, raised her glass and said, sadly, "Oh well, another year." She was wearing a long silver dress. All her close friends were about her.

Shortly after, when I went to give Jean her evening soup, I found her very close friend, the literary critic, Francis Wyndham, with her in a haze of smoke. We all talked for a while, then Francis left. Jean asked me, timidly, if I could continue

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to help her. I was reassured, and thought: well, I wasn't paid off. I wondered if she had been discussing it with Francis.

I said, "I'm very happy."

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, three reasons. My agent likes my new book."

Jean clapped her hands and laughed and said, "Hurrah."

"Then," I said, "I dropped a glass on the kitchen floor and it didn't break."

"Oh that's great luck," she said.

"And because I'm here."

She said, "That's very tactful."

We sat with drinks.

She raised hers to me. "You know, you're going to write what you want to write. I know it."

Whenever she said this, the implication was: not now, in time, in time.

I said, "Ah Jean—"

"Now don't disappoint me, honey."

We talked about writing in a very simplistic way.

I asked, "Have you ever thought about your readers?"

She shook her head. "No, never. They're sheep. Sweet. I appreciate them. But they're sheep, they follow after. And I never thought about money or fame. You mustn't ever think of money or fame. The voices go if you do. I don't think about anything but my writing."

"You don't think about yourself?"

She laughed. "I always thought I was different. I always thought I was a freak, that I felt things they didn't feel."

"Who?"

She shrugged. "They."

I laughed. "The ones who don't understand?"

"Yes, all of them. I've always felt best when I was alone, felt most real. People have always been shadows to me, and are more and more. I'm not curious about other people—not about what they do, a little about what they think—and the more dependent I become on people, as I must, the more I shy away from them. I don't know other people. I never have

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known other people. I have only ever written about myself.''

''Yes,'' I said. ''But doesn't that make you selfish?''

''Very,'' she said. ''You have to be selfish to be a writer.''

''Monstrously selfish?''

''Monstrously selfish,'' she said. ''But you've also got to realize that if you're going to be that selfish you can't expect anything from anyone.''

''And you're upset that you're so dependent now on others?''

She spoke in a flat, tired voice. ''I'm a prisoner. I can't go out to shop, I can't prepare my own food, can't bathe alone, or make my bed. I worry that people resent my depending on them. And they do, of course they do.''

''But do you in any way feel justified in accepting help because you're writing?''

She raised her hands and dropped them. ''Oh that: writing. No, nothing ever justifies what you have to do to write, to go on writing. But you do, you must, go on. You hear a voice that says, 'Write this,' and you must write it to stop the voice. I don't hear any voices any more. My last collection of stories was no good, no good, magazine stories. I wasted two and a half years on that book. Not good. Oh, the reviews say it's good. But you know when you've done something good, and those stories are no good. I can't do it any more.''

She said it in such a sober, straight way I almost said, ''Yes.''

She said, ''Let's have more drinks, honey. I know I'm not supposed to, but—the sins of the flesh and drink are very minor sins, aren't they?''

There was very little drink left. I had to run out to buy another bottle of gin and of sweet vermouth.

She was sitting in the middle of the couch. She said, when I sat on my chair, ''David, what will I do with my life?''

''What would you like to do?''

''I want to go away, I want to do something really wild, really really wild. What shall I do? I'm a prisoner.''

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Her small body appeared to me more hunched and twisted than ever, and locked in that position, so when she moved even her head her entire body, rigid, moved too, in jerks.

"I once tried to commit suicide," she said, "a long time ago. I cut my wrists. The doctor when I got to him sewed me up as if he'd done it six times before that same evening. I thought he'd be angry with me, send me to an asylum, but he didn't say anything to me."

I said, "Jean, would you like to hear some music?"

"Yes," she said, "the Polovtsian Dances. I saw Prince Igor once in Nice."

I put the record on, just at the part I knew she liked; the music was filled with the crackling and popping of scratches. She raised her thin gaunt arms high as the music pounded, and seemed to be punching the air above her head with her fists, her head lifted to look up, tears pouring down her cheeks, and she said, "It's so alive! It's so marvellous!"

The moment the particular dance she liked ended, she lowered her arms, wiped her eyes with her hands, and said, "That's enough of that."

When I next went to work with her, I found her, on the divan, surrounded by cosmetics: compacts, lipsticks, creams. She was rubbing colors from a little flat box of many different shades of eye make-up onto the back of her hand. She was excited. "Look at this," she said, "someone sent me all this. It'll keep me happy for weeks." I asked her who had sent it all, but she couldn't remember. I sat next to her, and we discussed the shades of make-up that might best suit her. She took out her compact to look in the mirror and try a shade; I was worried that with her shaking hands she'd get it in her eyes. She smeared some on a temple. Looking at herself in the little round mirror, she raised her upper lip as in a sneer. She dropped her hand.

"You know," she said, "being attractive is alien to women, so when they try the strain shows."

I didn't know what she meant, and I didn't ask her.

She asked me, before we got to work on her autobiog-

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raphy, if I would help her with some correspondence. I helped her to a chair by the desk and I opened a drawer to a heap of torn, open letters. She put on her spectacles, and reached out for a letter from the heap, examined it closely without, I thought, reading it, and handed it to me. Some letters were from acquaintances. We discussed if she should answer them, but as all the letters said the senders would be in touch again, Jean asked me to tear them up. When we came across statements from publishers or letters from her accountant, she would put her hands over her eyes and say, "I can't, I can't." She never knew who her foreign publishers were or what, exactly, was happening to her books; and she never knew, no matter how often she was told, how much money she had, except, she was sure, that it was very little. Letters from fans she asked me to read out to her and as I did she looked wistfully sad. If the letters included reviews, she asked for the title and the first line, then said, "Tear it up." When the title was "The Dark Underworld of Women" or "The Woes of Women" or had "women" in it in any way, she'd grab the review from me and tear it up herself and throw it in the basket, laughing, and say, "No, I've had enough of *that!*"

It is impossible to say what Jean's attitude was towards any subject. She seemed to have little interest in reactions to her work from serious readers, and, I think, she found it improbable that any opinion of hers should be taken seriously in the world; and yet she raged that no one paid any attention to her, no one at all. I wrote down some of the things she said about women: "I'm not at all for women's lib. I don't dislike women exactly, but I don't trust them. You can never tell them what you really think, because if they know what you think they'll do you down. I'm not, I've never been intimate with them. It's not worth it. Sometimes I think I'm not like other women, that I lack feminine qualities. I'm not, and I have never been jealous, for example, never, and women are very jealous of one another." And: "Don't tell anyone this. Women are kind, but they do for you what *they* want to do,

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not what *you* want to do. They can't imagine that you may want something quite different to what they want. Men at least try to do for you what *you* want." And when women who were not close friends spoke to her, she looked at them with a superior and wounded tolerance as she listened, and said in answer, simply, "Perhaps." To have argued with Jean about her opinions would have been mad: she simply would not have understood if one had said, "But, Jean, don't you wonder *why* you say that about women?" Self-conscious Jean—that is, the Jean who thought she knew—was bigoted; she became this way when she was drunk. When sober, the unself-conscious Jean—the Jean who knew she knew very little—emerged, and in her writing that Jean of course took over. As she herself said, her novels had no meaning, and any meaning imposed on them was ridiculous. Whatever attitude she had towards women (and blacks and liberals and any suppressed group struggling for equality), it was not in her self-conscious opinions, but in the unself-conscious writing, where, because she wrote about herself as she was, she had no set attitudes. In terms of psychology (she said she had never read Adler, Jung or Freud, didn't know what they were about, and didn't want to know) or social studies (she wouldn't have understood what a social study was), she never asked why her main female characters acted as they did: they just did, as she did. There is about them a great dark space in which they do not ask themselves, removing themselves from themselves to see themselves in the world in which they lived: why do I suffer? When Jean said she delved and delved into herself, I didn't understand; it was certainly not to question her happiness, or, more, unhappiness, in terms of the world she lived in, and certainly not her prejudices. These prejudices were many, and sometimes odd: Protestants, Elizabethans—

When the time came for dictating, she put her glass down. "All right," she said, "I'm ready to do some work on the autobiography."

Quickly, and it seemed to me without thinking, she dictated this paragraph:

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"Below the lonely house was the distant sea and Roseau Bay, and in the bay there was sometimes a strange ship flying the yellow flag, and we knew there was contagion on board. Rising up behind the house was untouched forest and, further up, a range of mountains, Morne Anglais, Morne Colle Anglais, Morne Bruce, Morne Diabletin. Morne Diabletin was the highest, and covered in mist. It had never been climbed because the summit was rock, and round the summit flew large black birds called devil birds. We could see the rain coming over the mountains and ran for shelter before it fell on us. There were a great many storms with forked lightning and thunder and great wind and heavy showers of rain, after which it cleared instantly, and the sky was blue again. When it was clear, the smell was fresh and sweet, and the sea below and the mountains above were bright."

I thought: this is beautiful, and it is because of this that I am working with her.

But the paragraph went under many different changes. She kept saying, "It should be vague, more vaguely remembered." After a while, I was writing it with her, and she seemed to like the collaboration.

She said, after the paper and pencil were put away, "You know, what I'm trying to write about, my life in Dominica, happened almost a century ago. I remember songs my great aunt taught me which her mother had taught her. It all goes such a long way back." With another drink, she said, "And what is Dominica like now? They say there are no roses in Dominica now. There were, I remember them. They gave such a scent to the air." She suddenly shouted, "Lies! Lies!" She bared her teeth. "A pack of lies. And who cares? Who does anything? Terrible things people do. Getting rid of the roses in Dominica. I hate the word 'people.'" She spit the word out. "People! I hate people! I hate everyone. I think they're all enemies. Terrible. No roses in Dominica. Who got rid of them? I know. I know. Up the Dreads. Yeah, the Dreads. They're in London, too, and they wear dark glasses. In Dominica they live in the forests. They're taking over. And

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who cares? Who gives a damn? Who? *No one* understands! Well, so what? I'll be dead soon."

I let her rage. Often she would open her compact, always with difficulty, and I'd watch her look in the little round mirror to powder her nose and cheeks and pull and push the hair around her face, her lips pursed with bitterness.

She suddenly stopped talking and looked at me for a moment in silence, blurry eyed, then asked, "Why do you come to see me?"

I smiled.

She said, "I feel I can say anything to you, that you do understand, a little, just a little. Why do you come? Is it curiosity?"

I kept my smile. "A little."

"And what else?"

I didn't know what to say. I said, "For some mad reason, I love you."

"You're not pretending that?"

"I said it was mad. Could madness be a pretense?"

"No, it couldn't. I do trust you."

I thought: why do I love her?

We didn't work the next time I saw her. Diana Melly, the writer and one of Jean's close friends, helped me to take her to a beauty clinic. She had been saying that no one understood how her morale depended on make-up and pretty clothes. She wanted her face done up and her lashes dyed black. The clinic was at the top of a very long flight of stairs, which we took one at a time, pausing at each step. In the rather severe grey waiting room, Jean said, "This looks serious." A young woman came for her, and I helped her up another flight of stairs into an alcove with green velvet curtains, then left to do shopping, and came back after an hour. She looked exactly as I had left her. In the car back to the flat, she said, "I'm a fool." Then she giggled and said, "Well, I'll never go back *there* again."

I stayed with her for a few hours. We didn't work. I said, "Do you consider yourself a West Indian?"

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She shrugged. "It was such a long time ago when I left."

"So you don't think of yourself as a West Indian writer?"

Again, she shrugged, but said nothing.

"What about English? Do you consider yourself an English writer?"

"No! I'm not! I'm not! I'm not even English."

"What about a French writer?" I asked.

Again, she shrugged and said nothing.

"You have no desire to go back to Dominica?"

"Sometimes," she said. She remembered something. "Honey, will you get from the top of the desk a piece of folded paper?"

I did, and gave it to her; she unfolded the paper to reveal three dried black leaves.

She said, "They're voodoo. Someone, I can't remember who, gave them to me. They're from Haiti. You put them under your pillow and you dream the solution to your problem. You can't drink too much and you can't take sleeping pills. I must try it tonight. I won't say I believe, and I won't say I don't believe."

She had the solution to her problem when I saw her again. She would do something really wild and go to Venice. Diana Melly and Jo Batterham would go with her. She asked me to come next time with two huge manila envelopes and a stick of sealing wax. We put the unfinished autobiography into the envelopes, sealed them with melted wax, and I wrote on each TO BE DESTROYED UNOPENED IF ANYTHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO ME, and she signed, with both Jean Rhys and E.G. Hamer. The envelopes were to be given to her accountant.

She said, "My work is ephemeral."

The work put aside, my following visits with Jean were chatty, and when I asked her about her life it was simply to get her to chat, and she did, with ease. I did not write anything down after in my diary, except this: "Jean told me she remembered seeing Sarah Bernhardt on the stage, in the last act of *La Dame Aux Camélias.* It was after her leg had been

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amputated, and she did the whole thing in a chaise lounge. Jean recalled her saying, *'Je ne veux pas mourir, je ne veux pas mourir,'* and a man in the seat next to Jean, tears streaming down his face, said, 'But she's just an old woman with one leg.' Jean herself began to weep; she took a handkerchief from her purse and wiped her eyes and said, laughing, 'I'll bet my tears are 90% gin.' I felt close to her.''

Sometimes we talked about writers, and she admitted, with no sign of great regret, that she hadn't read Balzac, Proust, Fielding, Trollope, George Eliot, James, Conrad, Joyce. She couldn't read Austen, she had tried. She had read a lot of Dickens. She had read, and remembered in great patches, the English Romantic poets, and Shakespeare. Her favorite writer, she said, was Richard Hitchens, who wrote turn of the century melodramas; she said his books took her away, especially *The Garden of Allah.* But when friends brought her from used book shops his novels she left them in a pile. She read, instead, thrillers, and in her late life she read almost nothing else but. In Chelsea, she read, over and over, a novel called *The Other Side of Midnight,* and she said, ''It's trash, perfect trash, but it takes you away,'' and made a sign as of going away, far off, with her hand. She said it was very important for a writer to have read a great deal at some time in his life. I presumed this was when she was a girl in Dominica, when she read books from her father's library and from the public library, where she sat on a veranda to read, with a view of the sea. While she was on tour in music hall the girls read *The Forest Lovers,* and Jean read it too. It was about a couple in the middle ages who ran away into the forest because everyone disapproved of their love, but they always slept with a sword between them. The sword, Jean said, was an endless topic of conversation. (''What a soppy idea. What'd they do that for? I wouldn't care about an old sword, would you?'') *The Forest Lovers* was the only book Jean read for years. She must have read when she started to write, though I am not sure what. She spoke very highly of Hemingway, and she at least knew many modern writers

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enough to comment on them. About Beckett, she said, "I read a book by him. It seemed to me too set up, too studied."

Shortly before she was to leave for Venice, amidst all the organization, she developed a slight cold. She thought she shouldn't go. The doctor said she could. On my last visit before she left, she was wrapped in a quilt, and had a silk scarf tied as a turban around her head. Her cold, she said, was worse. She really thought she couldn't go to Venice. She said she'd been reading a guide book about that city which said it was full of rats. She looked at me as if she had found out something everyone had deliberately kept from her to give her a false impression, and she had now found out the truth for herself. I said, "But there are a lot of cats." She raised her eyebrows.

I fantasized this when I left her, telling myself I shouldn't: that Jean would die in Venice, the typescript of the unfinished autobiography would be destroyed, and I would alone be left with the hand written pages of dictation, I, alone, would have Jean Rhys's secrets.

This was in late February, 1977. In November of the same year Jean returned to London for the last time. She stayed for months in the house of Diana and George Melly, where she had a bedroom and sitting room with pink floors. Diana helped her buy new dresses, and in her new dresses she sat in the sitting room off her bedroom and received visitors. But she would say, "I don't want to see anyone," and, ten minutes later, "No one ever comes to see me."

We resumed work on the autobiography. She had done very little on it over the summer and autumn, but she had made a mess of it. I sorted it out. Each time I came back it was messed up again. I would put it in order, with clips; she would ask to see it, the whole thing would fall apart in her lap and to the floor, and she would say, "I don't know if this will ever be finished, it's in such a mess." Finally, I put each section, or chapter, in a different colored folder, wrote in big letters the name of the sections on the folders, and numbered

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them. If, however, there was more than one version of the section in the folder, she would become confused; I had to make sure there was only one copy, and the previous work copies I tore up and threw away in Jean's presence. This tearing up and throwing away satisfied her for a time.

The days were dark grey and rainy; we had to light the lamps shortly after lunch, when we began the work. I read, countless times, the sections she wanted to hear again, and at the end she always said, "That needs more work," but she never got around to doing the work unless I said, "All right, let's do it now." As often as I read certain passages to her, she always wept at some and laughed at others; she might have been hearing them for the first time. I thought: yes, she's right, it will never be done. Many days, she couldn't work. There was no inspiration. She quickly became drunk. I became drunk with her. The work sessions degenerated into her shouting, "Lies! Lies!" And she would look at me, her face hard, and say, "You don't understand."

Once, angry, I said, "I do understand."

She immediately sat back, her face softened, and she said, softly, "I don't mean you."

I gathered, then, that when she said "you" she meant a very general "you": people.

When she said, "You know what you must do. Do you? You must know, and you *must* do it," I wasn't sure if she meant what I or people must do. "You know what you must do in your writing," she said. I became reassured: she was going to say that I must in my writing save all civilization. But she stared keenly at me, expecting me to reply to her repeated, "Don't you know?" I smiled. She said, "You must tell the truth about them." She slammed her hand down on the arm of the chair. "You must tell the truth against their lies." My anger gave way to sudden sadness.

She must have seen the sadness in my eyes. She said, "When I was a little girl I was always saying, 'That's not fair, that's not fair,' and I was known as Socialist Gwen. I was on the side of the Negroes, the workers. Now I say, 'It's not fair ,

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it's not fair,' about the other side, because I think they *aren't* treated fairly.''

I simply looked at her.

Her face, it seemed to me, became that of a little girl. She looked at the floor. She said, ''I don't know. I don't know any more.''

She continued to stare at the floor, her head tilted. She said, ''Maybe I do have black blood in me. I think my great grandmother was colored, the Cuban. Where else would I get my love for pretty clothes?'' She looked up at me and smiled. ''And oh how I envied them in their clothes, dancing in the street.''

But the autobiography was coming together in a rough way. The first part, which dealt with her life in Dominica, was at least in a completed draft. The second part, her life in England and France, had big holes. I took the sections home to work on them; she knew this, and approved at least to the extent that, when I read them with her on my next visit, she said, ''That's all right.''

In the black file which Jean had with her were yellow scraps of earlier stories; we went through them, and some of these, because they were her life, we transferred to the second part of the autobiography. Among the scraps was an old brown-covered notebook, half the pages torn out. Jean took it out.

''I don't know,'' she said, ''if this should go in. I wrote it, a kind of diary, a long time ago, when I was living in a room above a pub called the Ropemakers' Arms in Maidstone.''

''Why were you living in a room above a pub in Maidstone?''

She made a face. ''My third husband, Max, was in Maidstone prison. I have always been attracted, I suppose, to the thieves and saints, not that they were thieves exactly, and they weren't saints. I didn't know, and I don't know now, why my first and third husbands were sent to prison. I don't know much about my husbands, and I don't know much about my parents. Perhaps I wasn't curious. My daughter once told me my first husband, Jean, was in the Deuxième. I

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didn't know. Max was married before, but whether he had any children or not I don't know—perhaps a boy or girl. Men used to come to the house. I didn't like them, especially one. I didn't know what Max did with them. He went to prison. Enough. I have enough letters with the heading HMS PRISON. I visited him. One prisoner said to me, "It's all right for people like me, we should be here, but not for people like him." The warder with the one leg was nice. Max got a bit of money in prison and he saved it to buy me chocolates. The whole thing was so beastly I try not to think about it. I know the real villain, that one man I especially couldn't stand, went free. Max never recovered. When he got out, we moved to Bute, had a little house at the end of a row of houses, just at the edge of the downs, where we'd go walking. He began to fall. He fell on one of the walks. He began to fall as I've begun to fall. He died soon after he was released." She held the notebook out to me. "Anyway, I wrote this in my room. I called it 'Death Before the Fact.' Do you know that? It's from St. Theresa. In my room were two black elephants with long curving tusks on the mantle, and from the window I saw laundry and cabbage stumps. Will you read it to me? You'll see how long ago I wrote it, because the handwriting is clear."

I read, and tears came to my eyes. Jean had put herself on trial. She saw herself, defenseless, answering the questions of a judge who condemned her to a simple fate: to be unhappy, to write, and to die.

She asked me if I would take the notebook home and type it out. I did.

At the back of the notebook were the ragged margins of a number of torn out pages, and in the margins were words. I was not sure what had been written in the torn out pages, but I imagined drafts of letters. These words I typed out too, though I decided I would not tell her I had.

"My dear...I've just...worrying...to help...a little...to me...know...Leslie...called...Edward...with ...why they...took such...will be free...We are supposed

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...London...money...that I...lives...for a little...I can't...them...me...all...I didn't want...went...because...down...hell...I do...place...the...tell...was ...just before Max...approached by...a radio play...and I would...from...I can't...well...going...here...person ...But I fear...hopeless...do so...looking...live...My Dear Edward...The enclosed...Will you...I have...you please...is likely...careful...but...I...you...allowance ...I gave...worried...living...where...I get 36/6 a... Admiralty...from the P...from...that is...but...for the...30/...as...by...I...by...out...So I'm going to ...I married...know because...Brenda...to be...to get ...it...died I...sincerely wish I...So I'll...oh how I wish...of waiting...I...I...been...stresses...to see... and leave...approve of them...safeguards...that my... only be...think...I'm afraid the...gone on...I...after ...kind things...so badly...to feel...else...has...dread ...year...looking...be fair...you'd paid...lasted... friendly...after hearing...still...Strauss...As for the other...home that...a looney-bin...that at all...Brenda and...you must...necessary...You...who...I...myself ...do...myself...after...A...only...he...them...Did you, either of you...''

When I came back and read the typed-out diary to her, she thought she wouldn't include it in the autobiography. I insisted she must. She said, ''All right, if you cut certain passages.'' I cut them, but include here only this:

''Do you wish to write about what has been happening to you?''

''No, not yet.''

''You realise that you must?''

''I doubt whether it is as important as all that. Still I will write it, but not today.''

''Softly, softly, cathee monkey.''

I asked, guiltily, I suppose, as I had not only written about her in my diary, I had now stolen from her, ''Do you mind people writing about you?''

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"Yes," she said. "And I know people will try to uncover everything about me after I die to write it all down."

"Well," I said, "you won't know."

"Perhaps," she said.

The February days continued the January days of dark grey. Jean was not well. She didn't know what to do. Perhaps she should return to her cottage in Devon where a nurse would take care of her, as she was utterly incapable of taking care of herself. The first part of the autobiography was completed, the second part scrappy towards the end. I promised I would go down to Devon in the spring to help her; she smiled at me as she might smile distantly on all promises.

On my last visit, Jean was in bed. She had a plaster on her forehead covering a bruise she'd got from falling. She looked frail.

She said, "I want to tell you about an experience I had once." It was as if she had been thinking of it for a long time and had finally decided to tell me.

I asked, "Do you want me to write it down?"

"No," she said.

She said, "I've tried to write it, but have never been able to. It shows how inadequate words are. In Paris, my close friends the Richelots suggested and paid for a holiday for me in the south of France. I went with another girl. This was in the thirties. We went to Theoule, near Cannes. One day, alone, I had a bath in the sea, then lunch. As I knew the bus to Cannes, where I wanted to go to shop, was leaving soon, I ate my lunch quickly, and I didn't have any wine. But I missed the bus, and thought, oh well, I'll walk, it isn't a long way. At La Napoule I felt tired and left the road to sit by the sea. You could do that in those days. I can't describe what happened. No words, no words, there are not words for it, except, perhaps, in a still unknown language. I felt a *certainty* of joy, and terrific, terrific happiness, not only for me, but for everyone. I knew that the end would be joy. I felt, too, a part of the sea, the sun, the wind. I don't know how long I was there, but after a while I got up, went back to the coast road,

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and walked to Cannes. I went to a café for coffee. There was a big tree outside the café. I sat and I looked about and I thought: why do I hate people? They're not hateful. When I got back to Theoule I of course said nothing to my friend, but my feeling for the happiness for everyone lasted, lasted, perhaps, three or four days."

I stared at her.

She said, suddenly, "David, I think you've just seen my ghost."

I asked, "Do you believe in a life after death?"

She smiled. "Well, how can one be sure unless one has died? But I think there must be something after. You see, we have such longings, such great longings, they can't be for nothing."

"But you don't have any definite faith?"

"Oh, whatever faith I have I find expressed in man-made things, and to me the greatest expressions of faith I've ever seen are Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and *The Winged Victory of Samothrace.*"

"Do you see your books as an expression of faith?"

"My books aren't important," she said. "Writing is. But my books aren't."

Before I left, she said, "Give me the file, will you, honey?"

I put it on the bed beside her and with her spectacles she looked through the few scraps of old paper left in it. She took out a sheet.

"This is what I want to give you," she said and handed me the sheet. "It's the outline of a novel I wanted to write called *Wedding in the Carib Quarter*. I won't write it. Maybe you will."

I asked, "Will you sign it?"

She wrote on it, in large shaky letters that looked like Arabic script the message: "Think about it. It is very important." Then she handed it over to me.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

David Evanier is an associate editor of *The Paris Review*. His story, "Cancer of the Testicles," won the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction in 1975.

Norman Lock is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and a former Poetry Fellow of the Master's Program at Syracuse University. His work has appeared in *Oink!, The Little Magazine* and elsewhere.

Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues has published over thirty books, including *Le Museé, Les Monstres de Bomarzo* and *Le Cadran Lunaire*. His *Soleil des Loupes* won the Prix de Critiques and *La Marge* was awarded the Prix Goncourt. **Albert Herzing**, his translator, had his first collection of poems published in *Poets of Today, Volume VIII* (Scribner's). He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

POETRY

Jean Follain, the French Poet, was born in 1903 and died in 1977. The work published here comes from the collection *D'Apres Tout* (Gallimard) and other collections include *Exister, Territoires,* and *Tout Instant*. His work has appeared in English translations by Mary Feeney, William Matthews, W.S. Merwin, and others. **Heather McHugh** has taught at Antioch College, the MFA Writing Program of Goddard College, SUNY/Binghamton, and Columbia University. A collection of original poems, *Dangers,* (Houghton Mifflin) was published in 1977, and a second collection, *Blue Streak,* will be published in the spring of 1980.

Kenneth King is a choreographer, dancer, writer, and inventor. His dance work has been performed at the Judson Church, the Filmmaker's Cinemathèque, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Kitchen. As a writer, King is represented in *The Young American Writers, The New Art, The New American Cinema* and numerous other books and publications. "WORD RAID" is the text of a performance that premiered on May 24, 1978, at a benefit for the Poetry Project at St. Mark's in the Bouwerie in New York.

Peter Klappert currently teaches at George Mason University. "Matthew's Other Love Song" is from his book-length collection, *The Idiot Princess of the Last Dynasty: The Apocryphal Monologues of Dr. Matthew O'Conner.* His previous books include *Lugging Vegetables to Nantucket* (Yale Younger Poets Series) and *Circular Stairs, Distress in the Mirrors.*

Pier Paolo Pasolini was recognized, at his death in 1975, as a central figure in 20th century Italian culture. "The Ashes of Gramsci," published in 1954, is recognized as his first major poem. His works now total nearly fifty volumes: poetry, novels, essays, letters, drawings, paintings, and anthologies of dialect poetry and song. He is best known for his films, which he termed "Film-poems", including *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Teorama, Medea, The Decameron* and *Saló*. He acted in a number of them.

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He was murdered on November 1, 1975. In his artistic and political statements, he never failed to arouse angry reaction from some quarter. He was subjected to thirty-three trials on grounds ranging from anti-patriotism to blasphemy from 1949 until his death. It is widely thought in Italy that the young man currently serving a seven-year sentence for the crime did not act alone.

Pasolini was born in 1922 in Bologna and grew up in northern Italy. In 1949, after being a member of the Communist Party for two years, he was expelled, because of a scandal involving his homosexuality, by the local branch in the town where he was living. He never re-applied for membership, and would later describe his Marxism as "never-orthodox."

He wrote in 1970: "What made me a communist was the Friulian farmworker's struggle against the latifundia owners immediately after the war . . . I sided with the workers. Then I read Marx and Gramsci." From 1925 until his death Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the co-founder of the Italian Communist Party, was a political prisoner of Mussolini.

A book of Pasolini's poems, selected and translated by Norman MacAfee and Luciano Martinengo, will be published next year by W.W. Norton and by John Calder in England.

Translator **Norman MacAfee** has published in *New York Arts Journal* and *Christopher Street*. He is at work on a book of poems entitled *So Rerose Sore Eros*. **Luciano Martinengo** is a documentary film-maker whose films have been shown on RAI-TV and in Europe and America. He has recently published two books, a book of interviews with composer John Cage, and a study of experimental education in America.

Louis Simpson's most recent book of poems is *Searching for the Ox* (William Morrow), and his most recent book of criticism *A Revolution in Taste: Studies of Dylan Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell* (Macmillan). He is finishing a new book of poems.

John Wynne lives in New York City. He has just completed his first novel. His poetry has appeared in *Concept: An Anthology of Contemporary Writing*; he has written the stage adaptation of Yves Navarre's novel, *Sweet Tooth*, and his story, "The Sighting," was recently published by Tree Line Books.

INTERVIEWS

Jannika Hurwitt is a free-lance writer living in New York City.

Gerard Malanga lives in New York City. Little Caesar Press has recently brought out his issue of *Little Caesar #9* entitled "Unprecedented Information", an experiment in autobiography. He conducted the interview with Charles Olson that appeared in *The Paris Review #49* (Summer 1970).

Elizabeth Vreeland is a poet and writer. She divides her time between Long Island, New York, Miami Beach, and Colombia. Her work has appeared in *Antaeus*.

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ART

Donna Dennis was born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1942, and now lives in New York. Her sculptural depictions of hotels, subway stations, and rooming houses have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and Holly Solomon Gallery, New York.

Michael Hurson was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1941, and lives in New York and Chicago. His paintings, drawings, and sculpture have been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. He recently completed a play, "Red and Blue," that will be produced by Joseph Papp for the 1979-80 season of the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Robert Kushner was born in Pasadena, California, in 1949 and currently lives in New York. His paintings on fabric and paper have been exhibited recently at Holly Solomon Gallery, New York; Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, and Mayor Gallery, London.

Elizabeth Murray was born in Chicago in 1940. She presently lives in New York and teaches art at the School of Visual Arts. Recent one-woman exhibitions have been held at the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago.

Richard Thompson was born in McMinnville, Oregon, in 1945 and lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Recent exhibitions of his work include "Studies for a Geometric Cowboy" at the Tyler Museum of Art, Texas, and "Cowboy Nights, Part I" at Warehouse Living Arts Center, Corsicana, Texas.

FEATURE

David Plante, born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1940, has been living and teaching in London since 1968. He is the author of six books including *The Family* which was published in 1978 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Publication of this magazine has been made possible in part by a grant from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines which that organization has derived from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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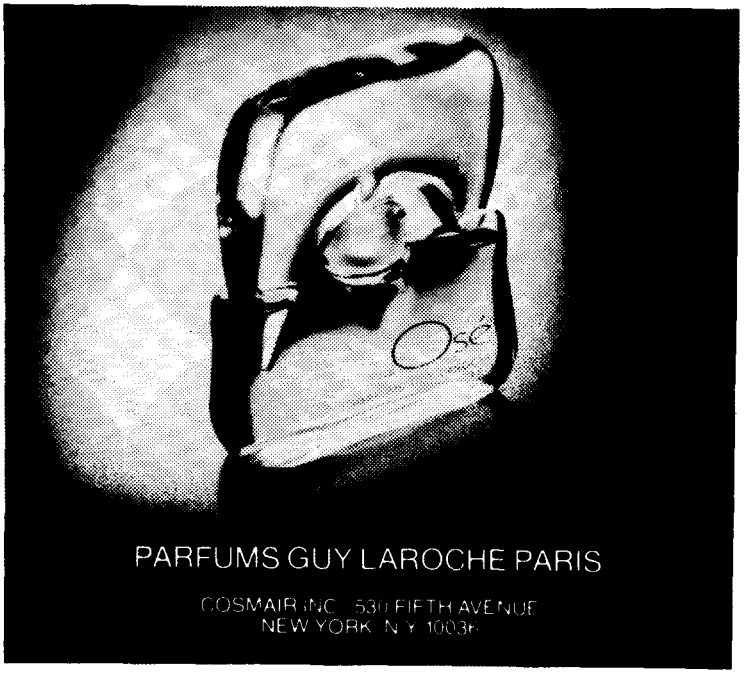

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